

Routledge Jewish Studies Series

CONTEMPORARY ISRAELI HAREDI SOCIETY

PROFILES, TRENDS, AND CHALLENGES

Edited by
Kimmy Caplan and Nissim Leon





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Contemporary Israeli Haredi Society is an invaluable resource for scholars, activists and policy makers keen to know more about the extraordinary currents reforming Israeli Haredi society and, by implication, Israeli society as a whole. It provides a productive framework and rich roadmap, illuminating the scholarly state of affairs across key disciplines and issues, including politics, space, education, and media. Comprehensive in scope and accessible in prose, this volume provides a timely, solid and essential addition to the study of Haredi Jewry in one of its critical moments.

Michal Kravel Tovi, *Associate Professor of Anthropology, Tel-Aviv University*

The numerical and political visibility of Haredi Jews is increasing in various countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and, especially, Israel. Their increased numbers spurred an increasing need to understand them within the context of the societies in which they live. This is especially the case with respect to Haredim in Israel, where they now constitute approximately 13 percent of the country's total population and approximately 17 percent of its Jewish population.

The editors of this volume assembled a group of scholars of Israeli Haredim specializing in a variety of significant areas, including ideology, politics, education, army service, mass media, health and medicine, to provide a comprehensive volume which lucidly introduces and analyzes contemporary Haredi society in Israel. This is a basic volume for anyone interested in gaining a deeper and more accurate understanding of Haredim, Haredi society in Israel and its interactions with the larger society.

Chaim I. Waxman, *Professor of Sociology, Hadassah Academic College, Jerusalem*

Contemporary Israeli Haredi Society

This edited volume offers profiles of contemporary Israeli Haredi (i.e., Jewish Ultra-Orthodox) society from several disciplinary points of view, resisting a generalized approach and examining the different, sometimes competing currents, that define it.

It is argued that Haredi society has undergone a process of rejuvenation in recent history: demographically, it has experienced steady and consistent growth; on the Israeli political stage, Haredi parties have become increasingly influential; and culturally, the Haredi presence is increasingly felt in Israeli news media, popular movies, and TV series. Each of the chapters in the book focuses on a particular topic and combines research findings with an assessment of the current state of the field. These topics encompass Haredi ideology, politics, military service, education, geography, the media, and healthcare – together, they paint a complex picture of Haredi society as one of contradictory layers, dimensions, and aspects.

Making sense of contemporary Haredi society is critical for anyone interested in understanding Israeli society as a whole, but the book will also appeal to historians of religion, scholars of contemporary conservative enclave religious societies and cultures, and those who focus on Jewish studies in the modern era.

Kimmy Caplan teaches Modern Jewish History at the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry, Bar-Ilan University. His field of scholarly interest is Jewish Religious History in the 19th and 20th centuries, and he focuses on American Jewish and Israeli societies.

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Contemporary Israeli Haredi Society

Profiles, Trends and Challenges

Edited by Kimmy Caplan and Nissim Leon

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Contemporary Israeli Haredi Society

Profiles, Trends, and Challenges

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Preface

Since the beginning of 2020, the entire world has been under the shadow of the COVID-19 virus, and remains so in many ways until late 2022, notwithstanding the vaccinations. This pandemic attacked all of humanity, upending normality in many countries and in many ways. Millions have fallen sick; restrictions have been placed and changes implemented on work, home, and community life; health systems have been stretched to breaking point; economies and markets have been shaken; and entire regions and states found themselves under periodic lockdowns. This virus reached Israel in mid-March 2020, and within a week emergency preparations and actions were launched by the government, involving experts and professionals from the medical system, the Ministry of Health, and other agencies. Ahead of Passover, which began on April 8, 2020, Israel was placed in lockdown for the first time.

Israeli society comprises several sub-societies, referred to by some as “tribes,” which maintained a complex set of inter-relations between them for decades and continue to. One of these is Haredi society, which, as we shall see in the introduction, has often been presented as a minority group, a conservative religious enclave, a counter-culture with respect to all other Jewish groups in Israeli society, and a culture that rejects all forms of the Zionist Jewish-national ethos. Haredi society was strongly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and at times the proportion of Haredi COVID-19 patients far outstripped its relative size in Israeli society. This caused a great deal of tension, and created unusual situations of collaboration between Haredim and non-Haredim. For example, it brought Haredim face-to-face with IDF soldiers in uniform who were detailed to

assist Haredi residents – soldiers in service of the military to which Haredi society largely refrains from being drafted.

Israeli public discourse about Haredim, Haredi society, Haredi leaders, and Haredi ways of life has often been and remains heated, it includes accusations and counter-accusations and fierce attacks on Haredim alongside Haredi counter-attacks and defenses. This discourse reveals tensions, fears, concerns, and stereotypes. For some people, it offers hope for the integration of Haredi society into broader Israeli society; others hope that Haredi society will undergo substantial change as a result of the crises it has experienced during the pandemic, leading to its deterioration and disintegration. Thus, for example, some have claimed that Haredi alienation from the IDF will undergo fundamental change after the latter stepped in to help distribute food to the Haredi population, even seeing this as a watershed in Haredi attitudes toward the State of Israel. Others predicted critical changes in Haredi society due to its leadership, ideological, and economic crises. Some characterized these crises as seismic. For example, that this society is experiencing a theological crisis similar in strength to that experienced within it following the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel.

It seems as though the rapid spread and the extreme nature of the virus, along with the challenges posed to many aspects of life by public health restrictions and the like, have only served to make Israeli public discourse with regard to Haredi society more extreme, and have harshened the tone of the predictions about its future. This shift indicates the extent to which the issue of Haredi society in Israel and its place within the country's social and cultural landscape exercises and challenges Israelis and Israeli society, and is widely perceived as both important and unresolved.

As of November 2022, the predictions referred to above, and others, have not been realized, and remain seemingly wishes more than sober or triumphalist assessments of reality. This book will not solve these puzzles, but it aspires to present an up-to-date picture of research into Haredi society in Israel, of some of its developing trends, and of its complex position in Israel's social, political, and cultural landscape. In this sense, the articles are more descriptive and provide multiple points of view on contemporary Israeli Haredi society, and do not attempt to be groundbreaking.

Notwithstanding these limitations, developments within Haredi society have consequences for other groups in Israeli society and Jewish societies in Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, and for discourse about many pertinent issues,

including religion and state in Israel and contemporary Jewish identities. This volume, we submit, will be helpful to gain a better understanding of Haredi society within this Israeli and Jewish polyphony of voices.

Going beyond, this volume stems from a considerable lacuna. A substantial portion of the research into Israeli Haredi society is published in Hebrew, and several existing overviews and monographs in English are somewhat outdated. Due to this society being an important component in understanding developments and trends in contemporary Jewish society in Israel and elsewhere, offering an updated overview including multiple research perspectives is, we believe, essential. It is important to emphasize that covering all potential perspectives is way beyond the scope of one volume, and therefore several aspects, some of which indeed critical, are absent from this book, such as the infrastructure of Israeli Haredi economy. We do hope to fill these voids in the future.

We owe a great deal to Professors Jonathan Rynhold and Elisheva Rosman both situated at the Department of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University, former and current heads of the Argov Center for the Study of Israel and the Jewish People at this institution, for their ongoing support for this project, their concern, and encouragement, all much appreciated, as well as the enthusiasm and commitment of Daniel Goldman that provided this project financially. Without the professional and most admirable commitment of Dr. Barak Bouks from the same Department of Political Studies, who oversaw and coordinated meticulously from the inception of this project, we would not have made it to this stage.

Finally, we thank Professor Oliver Leaman, editor of the Jewish Studies Series at Routledge, as well as the anonymous readers of the manuscript for their constructive comments and critique which helped us improve this volume in multiple ways. The staff of Routledge we were privileged to work with, Radhika Bhartari, Euan Rice-Coates, Grace Rollison, and James Whiting, Acquisitions Editor Middle Eastern, Islamic and Jewish Studies, were overly patient, understanding, attentive, and approachable, nonetheless demanding and uncompromising professionally, for all of which we are very grateful.

Unfortunately, one of the contributors, Professor Benjamin Neuberger, passed away during the final stages of our work on this volume. We pay tribute to this fine and important scholar who influenced the study of Israeli politics for several decades, acknowledge his noble and gracious personality which will be much missed by many, and dedicate this volume to his memory.

Kimmy Caplan and Nissim Leon

Rimmiy Caplan and Nissim Leon

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Introduction

Haredim and Israel, Haredim in Israel, Israeli Haredim¹

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Haredim: The Complex Mosaic of a Conservative Religious Society

The image we often have of Haredi society is taken from large events or demonstrations: A mass of men in black. However, as we zoom in on this picture and observe differences in dress code, at times subtle, it becomes clear that this is not a homogeneous society, and that it actually contains groups with very different identities – just as occurs when we look closely at a large group of soldiers from different military units. From afar, their uniforms may look identical, but a closer viewing reveals differences in attire, equipment, and insignia.

For many years, Israeli society was described by scholars as being organized around a strong center with a periphery of disadvantaged minorities ([Horowitz and Lissak 1989](#)). But in recent decades we evidence a shift that led to seeing it as a society comprising what are referred to in anthropological terminology as “tribes” ([Shokeid 2011](#)): Secular Jews, traditional Jews, Arabs, immigrants from Russian-speaking countries, religious Zionists, and Haredim. This tribal description is accompanied by the claim that these “tribes” do not limit themselves to negotiations over resources and power, with a view to reinforcing their boundaries. Rather, they have their own identity models with which they

aspire to provide an alternative to the national ideology held by the veteran Israeli mainstream, which is gradually losing its power ([Kimmerling 2004](#)). Consequently, Israeli society is in transition from a situation of multiple fissures and tensions which are managed by the state, to a society in which different identities are at war between themselves, over their role in running the state.

The historical roots of the Haredi “tribe” lay in Jewish Orthodoxy, which emerged at the beginning of the 19th century.² As of 2020, Haredim constitute approximately 12% of the population of the State of Israel ([Malach and Cahaner 2020](#), 9). In other words, it is a minority group in Israel, albeit a significant minority, that carries considerable weight in various arenas of Israeli society, such as politics and economy.

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that “Haredi” is essentially a family name, not a first name. That is, Haredi society comprises many streams, groups, and sub-groups, which have complex and often troubled and tense relations with each other. Like any other society, Haredi society can be viewed from different perspectives, each of which will provide different divisions and sub-divisions.

As noted, Haredi society developed out of the Orthodox stream, a development that took place within 19th-century Ashkenazi Jewish society in Europe. The most basic division in this context is that between Hasidim and Lithuanians-Mitnagdim (henceforth Lithuanians). The Hasidic movement developed in Eastern Europe toward the end of the 18th century. It spread primarily in Poland and the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire during the 19th century, attracted many followers and became an important mass spiritual and social movement in Jewish society that continues to be present and forceful in contemporary Jewish society. Some of the Hasidic courts such as Alexander, Gur, and Habad, developed gradually into large groups with many thousands of followers ([Biele, Assaf, Brown, Gellman, Heilman, Rosman, Sagiv, and Wodzinski 2018](#)). The term “Lithuanians” derives from the historical-geographical area in which opposition to the Hasidic movement took root most strongly, and thus only a few Hasidic courts such as Karlin set foot in this region ([Brown 2018](#)). The name “Mitnadgim,” literally “opponents,” originates from the struggle of this group against Hasidism; that is, this is a group identity based on negation of a competing group.

Each of these two streams, especially the Hasidic one, is composed of many groups and sub-groups – almost 100 in Israel alone. The substantive differences between the Lithuanians and the Hasidim have to do with their respective ideas

about what are the most important values in Judaism; their leadership structures and their leaders' sources of authority, as well as the importance of charismatic leadership; and the characteristics of community life.

While Hasidism views religious experience as the supreme Jewish value, Lithuanians place Torah study on the highest pedestal. The practical outcome of this difference is that anyone can have a religious experience, in many different ways, including via prayer, singing, or even eating, while becoming a Torah scholar is not for everyone, and is essentially restricted to a small minority. Large sections of Jewry over recent centuries did not have the wherewithal to engage in serious Torah study.

The second difference, as noted, relates to leadership, its sources of authority, and the role of charisma. Hereditary leadership emerged in the third generation of Hasidism, and has remained part of this movement ever since. Hasidic courts function as a form of kingdom, headed by a king and a royal family. These families are perceived by their followers as having "blue blood," thus making them fit to rule. Inheritance struggles in Hasidic royal families have been, and remain, one of the key factors in the many splits that have emerged in Hasidism. It is presumed that anyone who assumes the royal throne is blessed with powers and abilities not granted to regular people, and in many cases, their Hasidic followers consider them to be infallible. Thus, the source of leadership authority and charisma is rooted in family lineage and in perceived supernatural powers.

By contrast, the source of authority in the Lithuanian stream is intellectual-scholarly; that is, leaders are those who prove themselves the most talented in terms of Torah study and halakhic ruling. Hence, it is clear why institutions of learning – yeshivas (Torah schools for adolescent and young adult males) and *kollels* (religious seminaries for married men) – are at the core of Postwar Lithuanian life and education.

The third major difference concerns the character of communal life. In general, Hasidic courts are founded on strong connection with and commitment to the community, its leaders, and its educational, social, religious, and economic institutions. Among the Lithuanians, meanwhile, there is a lower level of communal commitment and greater flexibility, and thus communal bonds are not quite as strong.

It is important to note that while these differences are clearly expressed in educational and ideological programs and in research studies, in practice there is a considerable degree of blurring. For example, there are instances in the Lithuanian stream in which religious leaders are hugely venerated and attributed

with supernatural powers – one of the very forms of behavior that led this stream to be so fiercely critical of Hasidism.

As noted, Haredi Judaism is a European Ashkenazi phenomenon, and was brought to Palestine and subsequently the United States by Haredi Jews and Haredi leaders who came from Europe, whether from Hasidic courts or from the Lithuanian community. Europe is also the setting and focus of Haredi Judaism's historic consciousness and identity. For example, the vast majority of both Hasidic courts and Lithuanian yeshivas are named for the villages, towns, and cities in Eastern and Central Europe from whence they came or in which their leaders settled. Examples include Belz, Gur, Lubavitch, Mir, Ponevezh, Satmar, Slobodka, and Slonim.

During the second half of the 20th century, a new Haredi stream emerged in Israel: Mizrahi Haredim, otherwise known as Sephardi Haredim. This stream coalesced into a social movement and a distinct world with its own religious-cultural content, with the Shas party as its main political wing. This is a form of Haredi Judaism that is different from its Ashkenazi counterpart in many respects, but nevertheless has very strong Haredi characteristics. Similarly, it also encompasses multiple groups and sub-groups. One internal division is along ethnic lines, referring to countries, cities and communities of origin such as Algeria, Bukhara, Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia. Another is the division between those who tend toward Torah scholarship and halakhic expertise, bearing a certain similarity to the Lithuanians, and those who tend to emphasize mystical qualities regarding leadership and likewise sources of inspiration for the religious way of life, which have some similarities to Hasidism. The proselytizing (*teshuvah*) movement that emerged within Mizrahi Haredi circles, devoted to convincing and assisting non-religious and non-observant Jews to repent and join the Haredi folds, has also played a significant role in the development of Mizrahi Haredism ([Lehmann and Siebzeher 2006](#); [Sharabi 2013](#)). But the central aspect that distinguishes Mizrahi Haredim from Ashkenazi Haredim is the difficult social relationship between the two groups, which serves to amplify the ethnic distinctions between them ([Leon 2016](#)).

This is not the place for a detailed examination of every sub-group in each of the three streams mentioned, but the picture we have given should be enough for the reader to understand that this a broad and diverse modern “family” of conservative religious identities, to a large extent reactionary as we shall see, which is organized socially into distinct communities. On the margins of Haredi society in Israel, there are additional groups, founded on different connections

from those mentioned here. These include newly religious proselytes who see the Haredi way of life as a source of inspiration for their own religious lives; Hasidic groups that do not identify with a particular court; and “modern” Haredim, who seek to step beyond the traditional boundaries of Haredi society in fields such as higher education or employment, but who continue to live in accordance with its values and under its authority structures ([Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#)).

Though Haredi society encompasses different streams and groups, there are several characteristics that are shared by the majority of its component groups and individuals.³ Not all these characteristics are found in every group, and sometimes they appear in different ways and to different extents, but this is a degree of difference that can be found in any human society requiring a degree of flexibility in how it is defined.

The main characteristics relate to different aspects of daily life and to certain worldviews. We begin with daily life, and then proceed to values and worldviews:

1. **Dress code.** The dominant colors in male Haredi dresses are black and white. The main differences are between Lithuanian and Mizrahi Haredi men who wear familiar Western suits and hats, and Hasidic men whose dress includes a long coat stretching below the knee (*kapota*), and on special occasions, primarily Sabbath and Jewish holidays, a large hat usually made of fur (*streimel*). Women's dress is less easy to categorize by group, and the main differences lie in different methods for covering hair among married women for reasons of modesty, including hats, scarves, and wigs. This difference is not tightly aligned with the division into streams ([Levy 1989](#), 31–47; [Kosman and Rubin 2008](#)).
2. **Media and Communications.** In addition to the type of media outlets found in other modern societies, such as newspapers, radio stations, and websites, Haredi society also has its own unique forms of media and communications. These include street posters carrying public and religious information (*Pashkevilim*), and special phone lines for providing news, designed for users who are strict in not allowing other technologies and social media into their homes. In addition, the more common forms of media are different, as Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahar shows persuasively in her article in this volume.
3. **Internal Language.** One of the tools that helps enclave societies and

organizations to remain apart from their environments and to maintain their own unique internal discourse is language, and in the Israeli Haredi case it includes various combinations between Hebrew and Yiddish. The relationship between the two in different Haredi groups is dynamic and changes over time ([Assouline 2017](#)). In addition, Haredi spoken and written language is based to a large degree on associative familiarity with the world of classical Jewish texts, which are used to convey both overt and covert messages. This language is also informed by the diverse Haredi experiences and is often accompanied by a unique body language (habitus) ([Aran 2003](#); [Hakak 2009](#)).

4. **Geographical Separation.** The geographical distribution and residential patterns of Haredim are characterized by a clear tendency toward living separately in Haredi cities, some of which are in the West Bank, or in Haredi neighborhoods within mixed cities ([Cahaner 2009](#); 2017b).
5. **Education.** There are separate Haredi education systems for boys and girls, due to a religious-ethical-educational worldview according to which boys and men are commanded to spend their time in Torah study, while girls and women are excused from this duty; and also due to a desire to enforce strict separation between the sexes from a very young age, for reasons of religious modesty. While gender separation is not a uniquely Haredi phenomenon, the difference between the two sexes in terms of content and subject areas studied would seem to be unique, at least partly ([Perry-Hazan 2013](#)).
6. **Attitudes toward Zionism and the State of Israel.** Most Haredi groups maintain a stance of aversion, if not outright rejection, toward the Zionist enterprise. The vast majority recognize the State of Israel *de facto*, but do not accord it theological or ideological significance ([Ravitzky 1996](#)). But, somewhat contradictory, since the late 1980s most Haredim align and identify with Israeli nationalist and politically right-wing notions.
7. **Commitment to Tradition.** Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Haredim declare their commitment to the traditions of their communities of origin ([Heilman and Friedman 1991](#), 212–213).
8. **Commitment to Torah Study.** Religious study of the Torah is a central value of Haredi society. Some see it as the supreme value and the heart of the Haredi educational ethos, while others see it as an important pillar in Haredi life, but it is indubitably a key value ([Friedman 1991](#)).
9. **Commitment to Halakhah in Its Orthodox Interpretation.** Haredi

society in its entirety is committed to the Orthodox interpretation of Jewish halakhah, the codex that governs the daily comportment of every individual, according to Haredi understanding, from birth to death. This commitment tends to overrule the aforementioned commitment to communal and regional traditions ([Soloveitchik 1994](#)).

10. **Commitment to *Da'at Torah*.** The vast majority of Haredi communities and Haredi individuals declare their complete commitment and obedience to the rulings and guidance of their respective spiritual and rabbinical authorities in all areas of life (*Da'at Torah*, literally “Torah knowledge”) ([Brown 2014](#); [Katz 1997](#)).

There are additional characteristics that can be more difficult to define precisely, but which are part of the way of life of Haredi groups and streams in a similar manner to other conservative religious cultural enclaves ([Sivan 1995](#)). These include, for example, constant readiness against threats; the monitoring and defense of the society's borders and its communal arrangements; and remaining alert to the possible intrusion of any threat to the society's values and way of life.

Historical Roots and Socio-Religious Characteristics

Several years ago, a leaflet was distributed in a Haredi study hall (*bet midrash*) containing the response of Rabbi Yehudah Adas, one of the most prominent yeshiva heads in the Sephardi Haredi community, to recommendations from the Israeli Ministry of Health on educating children about healthy eating. The recommendations described the health dangers related to eating the sweets that are regularly handed out to children in synagogue by parents and other worshippers, in an effort to attract children to prayer. The Ministry recommended handing out healthier food products instead such as dried fruits, nuts, and natural sweets. Adas gave these proposals short shrift, claiming that this was a plot by the secular State of Israel to lead children away from tradition. Children, he explained, come to synagogue for the processed sweets whose colors and tastes are familiar to them. They identify the synagogue as a place of sweetness and pleasure, and thus familiarize with public prayer. The sweets are an effective educational tool, and thus the aim of the Israeli Health Ministry, Adas argued, was to turn children away from synagogue.

This story embodies an important characteristic of Haredi Judaism: The struggle for religious sovereignty, accompanied by a high degree of suspicion

toward the world, which is depicted in stark, black-and-white terms of “us” and “them.” According to this stance, the Ministry is not concerned with what is best for the children; rather, it is ranged alongside powerful secular and other forces which have been attempting to obliterate religion and tradition for almost two centuries. In this context, the Hebrew etymology of the word “Haredi,” literally “fearful,” is instructive. It reflects the Haredim's unceasing state of religious high alert and defensiveness toward anything seen as different or any forces of change, on the assumption that these might bring to an end their unique way of life, which would mean the end of the only authentic expression of Judaism that remains, as they view themselves. This sense of constant existential threat and the accompanying fears are one of the epigenetic group signatures of Haredi society, rooted in the foundation of European Jewish Orthodoxy.

Historically, Jewish society in Europe experienced a series of upheavals and changes, beginning with the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal at the end of the 15th century and continuing through the ensuing three centuries. The influence of some of these upheavals can still be felt, such as the Sabbatean and Frankist messianic movements, the Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) movement, and Hasidism. Each of these changes contributed, in its own way, to the gradual disintegration of traditional Jewish society, a process that occurred between the middle of the 18th and the end of the 19th centuries. At its heart was a deep-seated change in consciousness and awareness regarding the past, which gradually led to a fracturing of Jewish society into different religious and non-religious streams and groups. Each of these had its own discourse about traditional Jewish society, whether based on criticism of it, rejection of it, partial agreement with it, or a desire to continue it.

The appearance of Orthodoxy as an ideological stream, and subsequently as a social, religious, and political movement, was rooted in the recognition of Jewish spiritual leaders first and foremost Rabbi Moshe Sofer (1762–1839) that Jewish society was undergoing significant and irreversible changes, headed by the above-mentioned disintegration of traditional Jewish society and the emergence of religious denominations. As they understood it, these streams represented a deviation from the path of that traditional society, and thus posed a threat to the future of “true” Judaism, the sole authentic representative of traditional Judaism and thus of Judaism as such ([Katz 1986](#); [Samet 1988](#)). That is, the disappearance of Orthodox Judaism would mean the disappearance of Judaism, leaving only mutations of Judaism in the form of denominations and communities that had strayed from the path.

It is important to emphasize that this is the point at which the paths of many Orthodox and Haredi Jews, on the one hand, and scholars of these societies, on the other, diverge. The former claim that they are the sole authentic and legitimate incarnation of Judaism as it always was, while the latter argue that they are in fact a modern phenomenon which did not exist in traditional Jewish society.

The *Haskalah* movement, followed by the Reform movement, and then the socialist movements that sought to pursue social goals such as equality and the overthrow of organized religion, gained strength among European Jewry over the course of the 19th century. The ranks of Orthodox Judaism gradually thinned, and by the end of the century, it found itself a minority group in European Jewish society. This process was a highly worrying, even terrifying, experience for Orthodox Jews and their leaders, especially given the rapid speed and scope of this transformation. In their eyes, until the end of the 18th century European Jewry was contained within traditional Jewish society, and all this had disintegrated within just a few decades. This is pivotal in any attempt to understand the degree of fear and sense of existential threat in Jewish Orthodox self-consciousness. These characteristics of Orthodoxy have permeated Haredi society, which is one of the offshoots of Orthodox Judaism.

Feelings of existential threat grew stronger from the end of the 19th century through to the mid-20th century, as the drift from the Orthodox camp to other groups grew stronger, and as other movements emerged and gained prominence, including the secular Zionist Jewish national movement; the Conservative movement in the United States; the Bund in Poland and America; and various socialist, communist, and anarchist movements.

Anyone who sees themselves as being under existential threat responds accordingly: The survival instinct dominates, and almost anything can be perceived to be a threat. Stemming the tide and stiffening the ranks requires strategic and tactical preparation. Those who defend the battlements of Judaism must be filled with a sense of mission and commitment, an awareness that everything depends on them, a feeling of belonging to a small elite unit, better and stronger than all others, and with a very strong internal cohesion based on the justness of its path. In these terms, Haredi society is one of the founding fathers of contemporary fundamentalist groups, cultural enclaves whose religious-cultural ethos is opposed to the majority society within which they are situated (Sivan 1995).

So far, we have related to Orthodoxy as a single group with a uniform

worldview, but, like “Haredi,” the term “Orthodox” is a family name and not a first name, and this family contains various types and sub-types of Orthodoxy. For example, neo-Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy, each very different from the other and each containing multiple sub-groups. Relations among the “Orthodox family members” are complex and often tense, and sometimes a great deal of energy is devoted to intra-Orthodox struggles, which can be just as fierce as the struggles between Orthodoxy and other Jewish groups. The different identities of these groups and the relations between them are vital aspects to pay attention to, particularly because they are vital to Orthodox Jews themselves.

Despite this considerable internal difference, the aforementioned sense of existential threat is common to all Orthodox groups, as is the understanding that the ability to survive is dependent on the ability to both bolster the ranks from within and return fire externally. Thus, for example, inspired by Rabbi Sofer, Orthodoxy developed a very strict and demanding approach to living a religious life, one which stands in opposition to certain core principles that have been part of Jewish halakhah for centuries. One of many examples is certain Jewish customs that have been upgraded to become far stricter and more binding norms. Similarly, Orthodox leaders understood that they would have to adopt modern tools in order to effectively combat modernity. An excellent example of this was the founding of Orthodox newspapers in Europe from the second half of the 19th century onward, despite the initial reluctance of Orthodox spiritual leaders, in order to participate in the Jewish public discourse in Europe which was being conducted in the Jewish press.

The initial research context for the appearance of Orthodoxy and its characteristics was molded by a series of historians. The first of these was Moshe Samet, who began his work in this field at the end of the 1960s. Samet was joined by his teacher, Jacob Katz (1904–1998), Mordechai Breuer (1918–2007), Robert Liberles (1944–2012), Michael Silver, Menachem Friedman (1936–2020), Yosef Salmon, and others ([Caplan 2009](#)). The aforementioned characteristic of Orthodoxy as a threatened and defensive society that formed in response to processes affecting Jewish society in Europe from the end of the 18th century onward is for the most part true of Haredi society in the 20th century in general, and in particular of Haredi society that began to form in Palestine during the last decades of the 19th century. This latter society focused its energies on responding to the Zionist movement and subsequently the State of Israel, which were both viewed as existential threats to its future.

Haredi Society in Mandatory Palestine and the State of Israel: Historical Contexts

The Jewish settlement in Palestine enjoyed the support of several major Orthodox and Haredi leaders during its early stages, in the last third of the 19th century, as did the Zionist movement at the very beginning. But at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, these leaders became more aware of the national-secular character of this movement. Moreover, some Zionist leaders spoke out against religion and religious values, and some sought to replace these values with national-secular values and culture. Having understood “the nature of the beast,” many Haredi rabbis and leaders distanced themselves from the Zionist movement, and others publicly opposed it. Some did so vehemently, rejecting its very legitimacy. Their letters to this effect appeared in 1900 in an edited volume entitled *Or Layesharim* (literally “Light for the Righteous”). One of them, a letter from Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson (1860–1920), the fifth leader of Habad Hasidism at the time, is an excellent example of the rejection of Zionism from a theological, political, and practical standpoint ([Landa and Rabinovich, 1900](#), 57–62; [Ratzabi 1996](#)). The various oppositional stances to the Zionist enterprise and the State of Israel that are still voiced by Haredi society in the present day are based to a considerable extent on those developed at the turn of the 20th century ([Ravitzky 1996](#)).

The social and ideological agendas of Haredi groups and communities in Europe were greatly influenced by the events and developments in the regions in which they lived. It is in this context the establishment of the Haredi political movement Agudat Israel in Katowice, Poland, in 1912, should be understood ([Bacon 1996](#); [Levin 2011](#); [Mittleman 1996](#)). As noted, the agenda of Haredim in Palestine was shaped by the Zionist movement, its vision, and its activities. The longstanding Haredi community in Palestine, which was a dominant component of the Jewish population in Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, was called the “Old Yishuv” (*hayishuv hayashan*) because it represented a worldview that was in total opposition to the Zionist “New Yishuv” (*hayishuv hehadash*). While the New Yishuv sought to create in Palestine a “normal” society like that of any other nation, an independent and productive society with a shared national identity, the Haredi Old Yishuv was bound to the religious-theological significance of the Holy Land for the Jewish people. Raising potatoes and milking cows could be done anywhere in the world, they argued, but living a full religious life was possible only in the Land of

Israel. Furthermore, according to Orthodox interpretation, close to one-third of the 613 commandments mentioned in the bible are categorized as “dependent on the Land,” that is, they can only be fulfilled in the Holy Land. Ritual and spiritual religious perfection can only be attained in the Land of Israel, which is the ultimate aspiration. This approach had critical implications for the organization of the Old Yishuv in Palestine, its institutions, and its economic infrastructure ([Friedman 1977](#)). These mainly offered a mirror image of the vision of the New Yishuv and the infrastructure for the culture of the Haredi enclave in Palestine and subsequently in the State of Israel, even though in daily realities the boundaries were often blurred ([Kaniel 1982](#)).

The British conquest of Palestine in the First World War and the Balfour Declaration in 1917 launched a new era in the history of the Jewish Yishuv. With the end of the British military regime and the beginning of civilian rule, it began to establish institutions and to discuss what would within a few years would become known as the “constitution of the communities.” The Jewish-Zionist Yishuv began a gradual and wide-ranging process to realize its vision which included building a political system, establishing social and cultural institutions, economic development, and urban, rural, and kibbutz settlement.

Until the mid-1920s, the majority of the Old Yishuv consisted of extreme Haredi groups which completely rejected the legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise and sought to maintain total separation from it. This approach was very different from the politically pragmatic approach adopted by the World organization of Agudat Israel and its center in Poland, though the Jerusalem branch of Agudat Israel in fact expressed the extremist views of the local community. The establishment of this branch came alongside the founding of the Haredi Council of Jerusalem (*Edah Haharedit*), a community umbrella organization dedicated to serving the needs of the extreme Haredim. Thus, the Jerusalem branch of Agudat Israel operated as the political wing of Haredi society in Palestine while the Haredi Council of Jerusalem was its communal wing. Both aspired to political and communal independence from the Mandate, but all of its applications for political-communal recognition on a separate basis from the Zionist institutions were rejected by the British authorities.

The person who symbolized these political efforts more than anyone was Jacob Israel de Haan (1881–1924). Born into a traditional-religious family in Holland, de Haan gradually shed his Jewish identity, eventually marrying a non-Jewish woman. He then underwent an opposite process of religious return, joining the Mizrachi movement, and subsequently the extreme Haredim. de

Haan, who had completed law studies and held a Ph.D., was a man with a sharp tongue and pen, charismatic presence, and a gift for writing. He came to Palestine as a correspondent for a Dutch newspaper and joined the ranks of the extreme Old Yishuv. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1848–1932), the leader of the Haredi Council of Jerusalem, recognized his qualities, and de Haan became a kind of foreign secretary for the organization. He met with British representatives and with Transjordanian leaders, attempting to separate the Council from Zionism and to attain recognition for it as an independent entity. His efforts were cut short on June 30, 1924, when he was murdered at dusk at the entrance to the *Shaare Zedek* hospital in Jerusalem ([Berkowitz 2005](#); [Fontijn 2015](#)).

The prominence of the extreme Haredim reached its peak in the mid-1920s, and then declined due to key changes in the demography of Haredi society in Palestine. Between 1925 and 1935, Haredim from Germany and Poland immigrated to Palestine as part of the Fourth and Fifth waves of immigration, the large majority of them identified with Agudat Israel and Poalei Agudat Israel in their countries of origin, and they held more moderate and pragmatic views than the extreme Jerusalem Haredim. This demographic change affected the character of the local Agudat Israel branch, whose representatives, led by Moshe Blau (1885–1946), began negotiations with the Jewish Agency and the Chief Rabbinate. In addition, Poalei Agudat Israel set foot in Palestine in the early 1930s. This was a workers' movement founded in Poland to protect the rights of Haredi Jewish workers, which in its new incarnation in Palestine took on an agricultural-settlement character that was aligned with Zionist values. Poalei Agudat Israel founded a series of settlements in the Nahal Soreq region during the 1930s and 1940s, and existed as a political-labor-settlement organization until the 1970s ([Fund 2018](#); [Gebel 2017](#)).

Consequently, by 1935 the extremists lost their dominance in Haredi society in Palestine, and though they remained strong in numbers in Jerusalem, their influence waned. In 1935, a group of extreme Haredim established Agudat Hevrat Hayim, literally “Society of Life,” an organization whose members were required to maintain complete separation from Zionist institutions and from Zionists in general, and it became increasingly critical of Agudat Israel due to the latter's collaboration with the Zionists. This collaboration was seen by the extremists as treason, and as often happens in extremist religious groups, much energy was directed toward enemies within the camp, who are often perceived as far more dangerous and problematic than external enemies. Three years later, in

October 1938, *Neturei Karta*, literally “Guardians of the City,” was established, a political-communal movement standing for separation from the Zionist enterprise, that gradually became a prominent Haredi organization in the Yishuv and during the first two decades of the State of Israel. This was thanks in no small part to its leader Amram Blau (1900–1974), the brother of the above-mentioned Moshe Blau ([Caplan 2017](#); [Inbari 2016](#)).

The conduct of the Haredi Council of Jerusalem and *Neturei Karta* – which were not open to any dialogue with the Zionists or recognition of them, supported dialogue with the local Arab leadership, and eventually attempted to persuade the British not to leave Palestine when the Mandate finished – was met with great anger by the Zionist Yishuv. They were perceived as traitors, attempting to undermine the status of the Zionist Yishuv and sabotage the establishment of the State of Israel, which they refused to recognize. But, as a small minority, they had almost no impact in practice, and it was the pragmatic line taken by Agudat Israel that dominated, as the latter organization became the representative of the moderate Haredi mainstream in Palestine. Its cooperation with the pre-state Zionist institutions grew closer: Agudat Israel worked to gain immigration certificates for its members who sought to come to Palestine, and it joined forces with the Yishuv's institutions to aid European Jewry during the Second World War. This process reached its peak when the organization's representatives signed the Declaration of Independence, and Agudat Israel was part of the political coalition and Israel's government during the State's early years.

However, this cooperation was a reflection not of strength but of weakness, and of the understanding that Zionism had won this decades-long battle. During the 1940s, Haredi society was faced with two particularly difficult and challenging formative events. As the facts began to emerge of the Holocaust of European Jewry, including Haredi Jewry, it became clear that many Hasidic courts had suffered a fatal blow and their institutions destroyed, likewise yeshivas and their students and leaders. This organizational, institutional, economic, and religio-communal devastation was accompanied by significant theological questions, based on the fundamental worldview that God dictates events in the world, including the Holocaust itself ([Schweid 1994](#)). While beginning to grapple with the impact of the Holocaust, Haredi society witnessed the establishment of the secular Jewish State of Israel, signifying the victory of Zionism, another perceived product of God's will. Thus, Haredi society found itself suffering blow after blow and facing a state whose political leadership was

opposed to everything represented by the Haredi “exilic” Jews.

Some Haredim left the ranks and joined the “winning convoy,” and the Haredi religious and political leadership became even more fearful of what was to come. They considered it a realistic prospect that Haredi Jews would not be able to continue their way of life in the State of Israel. It is important to note that these fears were also shared by political and religious leaders in the religious Zionist camp, who supported the State of Israel ideologically and theologically, and this drove the four Orthodox religious parties in Israel, namely Agudat Israel, Poalei Agudat Israel, Mizrachi, and Hapoel Hamizrachi, to unite, despite the great differences, tensions, and resentment between them, and form a single party at the first Knesset elections ([Bauer 2011](#)). This decision proved politically astute, and the United Religious Front won 16 seats out of 120 at the elections for the First Knesset, held in January 1949.

Yet this was not sufficient to overcome the dire outlook. The situation of Haredi society following the Holocaust and the victory of Zionism justified the harsh assessments of its leaders regarding its future and its ability to survive in the State of Israel. These doubts were seemingly shared by some of the State's leaders, including its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973). These observers were convinced that they were witnessing the final days of Haredi society, which they thought was in its death throes, shortly to become merely a chapter in Jewish history. The combination of this weakness and their identification of Haredi Jews as the last remnant of “our grandparents’ home” and the only representation of “authentic Judaism” seem to have been the reason behind the concessions made by the Zionist state to Haredi society in several areas: its membership of the governing coalition, acceptance of its basic existential demands in what are known as the “status quo letters,” and willingness to permit deferral of military service for some 400 yeshiva students. This last concession was not part of the status quo agreement, but rather the result of a meeting between Ben-Gurion and Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (1878–1953), a respected Lithuanian Haredi leader. Both participants in this meeting were fairly convinced that the camp represented by the other would not be around within a couple of decades.

But they were both wrong. During the first two decades following independence, Haredi society underwent a demographic, communal, institutional, and economic rehabilitation, as well as revitalization of educational institutions, a strong sense of mission and devotion, and resurgence of historical collective memory, led in part by Holocaust survivors ([Shaul 2020](#)). This

occurred during a period in which its political representatives were on the opposition benches following their resignation from the government in the summer of 1952, in the wake of legislation that imposed mandatory service in the IDF for women, something they vehemently opposed. With the return of Agudat Israel to the coalition formed by Menachem Begin (1913–1992) in 1977, it became clear that this was now a stable society that had survived in spite of the predictions of its disappearance. Ever since, with two exceptions, Haredi representatives have been members of Israeli governments and Haredim and Haredi society have featured in Israel's media, public discourse, cinema and theater, leisure arena, economy, and labor market. This represented a transition from survival mode to becoming an established force, a more assertive and vital presence projecting considerable self-confidence, in contrast to the official Haredi rhetoric, which continues to emphasize the threats and dangers facing the last remnant of “authentic” Judaism ([Caplan and Stadler 2012](#)).

While the subject of this book is Haredi society in Israel, it is important to note that this process of rehabilitation and revitalization occurred to a similar extent in Jewish communities in the diaspora. After the Second World War, the United States became the second-largest center of Haredi communities, and its concentrated Haredi population essentially replaced that which existed in Europe in the decades before the war. Additional Haredi communities can be found in various European countries such as Australia, Belgium, England, France, and Latin and South America, though these contain far smaller numbers than the communities in America and Israel. The vast majority of Haredi communities in Israel and the Jewish diaspora are concentrated in modern urban centers, particularly major cities and their environs. Alongside this renewal, we evidence the growth of vibrant Sephardi Haredi communities in several Latin American countries and in France.

When Prophecy Fails: The Impact of the Growing Strength, Size, and Presence of Haredi Society

The mid-20th-century prophecies of the collapse and disappearance of Haredi society proved false. Instead, it has rebuilt itself, growing larger and stronger demographically, politically, and economically. As we shall see, this has significant implications for the research agenda with regards to Haredi society, and for the agenda of the Israeli political system, government ministries, local and national agencies, and policymakers in all fields.

Moreover, this is a population in which the younger age groups (0–20) form a much larger share relative to other groups in Israeli society. Taking into consideration the much higher birth rate in Haredi society, certain demographic projections suggest that by 2070 it will become close to 30% of the population in Israel ([Malach and Cahaner 2019](#)). Consequently, some view the state's economic, social, and political future, and indeed its Jewish identity, as critical issues that are increasingly bound to the status of Haredim in Israeli society and to relations with them. Thus, the growing attention paid to Haredi society by researchers and by policymakers, and policy implementers is only natural, and indeed necessary.

Research into Haredi demography in the near future is divided between two approaches: The first emphasizes the need to account for the number of those joining and leaving Haredi society ([Regev and Gordon 2020](#)), while the second highlights the high Haredi birth rate relative to other groups in Israeli society. According to the first approach, Haredi society in Israel is expected to grow in the coming decades, but not to the considerable extent claimed by those who focus on birth rates. Moreover, demographic growth actually leads to the formation of a broader and softer Haredi core, and thus the character of Haredi society is likely to change somewhat.

Those researchers who focus on birth rates argue that the demographic growth of the Haredi population and the increase in its relative size as a percentage of the total Israeli population will lead to a socioeconomic crisis. They claim that this will be due, among other things, to the threat to the welfare state model and the consequences in terms of the tax burden that will fall on Israel's middle classes, in order for the state to support the continued economic existence of Haredi society.

We do not seek to predict the future, but it is plausible that a combination of continued Haredi self-segregation, large-scale non-participation of Haredi men in the labor market, and the economic dependence of Haredi society on the political system would increase the likelihood of crisis, and thus significantly widen the fissures and tensions between Haredi society and majority Israeli society.

The Haredi way of life is often presented as exilic, a religious response of a minority group toward a large hegemonic group surrounding it. In Israel, too, there is a surrounding majority society, and yet this is a special case in that it consists of a religious response to a majority Jewish culture, one to which Haredi Jews belong ethnically, but from which they feel exiled nationally. [Ravitzky](#)

(1996) coined this as “exile among Jews.” Consequently, this is not just a communal and cultural struggle but also a political struggle, for Haredi sovereignty in the face of a non-Haredi Jewish society that currently wields national sovereignty. This tension is very strongly felt in Israel, and very much influences the already complex relations between Haredim and non-Haredim in the country.

Political arrangements between the Haredim and the state have played a significant role in the struggle over national sovereignty. The roots of the debate over these arrangements can be found in the ideological arguments described above between the Zionist movement and Haredi leaders in Eastern and Central Europe at the turn of the 20th century (Ravitzky 1996). Though these leaders viewed Zionist national aspirations toward the Land of Israel as a form of messianism that was completely forbidden, and considered Zionist leaders to be committed to a purely secular-nationalist agenda, the subsequent growth and strength of the Zionist movement and the realization of its vision of establishing a Jewish State presented them with some serious questions. One of these related to the struggle over religious sovereignty, which was not always fought openly but was behind the complex conduct of Haredi representatives vis-à-vis the State of Israel. They supported the establishment of the state, and at the same time openly criticized its character and actions.

The self-distancing and self-segregation of mainstream Haredi society (as opposed to anti-Zionist extremists that constitute some 2–3% of contemporary Haredi society) is evident in several contexts: The fact that the vast majority of young Haredi men do not perform mandatory military service, and are instead directed solely toward Torah study; the initial opposition of Agudat Israel during the early decades to the establishment of the state; and the educational and geographic detachment of Haredi society. This last aspect finds expression in the struggle for independence of Haredi education; in the rejection of general study subjects which are needed for participation in the labor market, such as mathematics, English, and reading skills; and in the concentration of the Haredi population in separate geographical spaces, which has led to the creation of Haredi “ghettos.” At the same time, the political cooperation that began in 1977, bringing economic, political, and civic benefits to Haredi society, has to some extent moderated this distancing and segregation and the struggle for religious sovereignty. At the very least, it has veiled this struggle as a fight to preserve cultural rights and protect political gains.

In the final decades of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st

century, a series of researchers drew attention to various changes within Haredi society and to signs of integration into general society, which they termed “Israelization” ([Caplan and Sivan 2003](#)). However, recent years have also seen reactionary and conservative reactions to these developments. There have been calls in mainstream Haredi society to build the walls higher, even at the risk of confrontation with the state and of losing the advantages that come with membership of the governing coalition ([Nayot 2018](#)). This firm rebuttal of the changes underway in Haredi society points to the dangers of what it considers a slippery slope, and of the price paid for greater integration.

Thus, it is important to also note conservative counter-trends in the Haredi mainstream, to the voices opposed to change, and so to consider the growing complexity surrounding the future of Haredi society in Israel. The articles in this volume reflect this crossroads.

The Study of Haredi Society: From Humanities to Social Sciences, from Theoretical to Applied

As noted above, since the 1970s we evidence significant developments and changes in research on Haredi society in Israel. This is seemingly connected to the return of Haredi parties to government in 1977 after 25 years in opposition, to the increase in their political power, and to the public profile of Haredi members of parliament (*Knesset*), political dealmakers, and activists and their entry into positions of power and influence in the political system. It also has to do with the rehabilitation and stabilization of Haredi society, which, as mentioned, was prematurely eulogized in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The early studies of Orthodoxy by Moshe Samet laid the foundations for those of Israel Bartal, Yehoshua Kaniel, and others on the Old Yishuv, and for the work of Menachem Friedman. In many respects, Friedman was the first to conceptualize the research of Haredi society, and to combine a historical and sociological approach. His first comprehensive conceptualizations appeared in his *Society and Religion* (1977), which focused on the first half of the British Mandatory period, and his subsequent conceptualizations in *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society* (1991) related mainly to the first decades following Israeli independence.

Perhaps the most prominent of these was the thesis of the “society of learners,” according to which the dominant pattern of Haredi life in Israel is based on institutionalized Torah study by men. Moreover, Friedman

characterized this phenomenon and its relation to changes in norms in the Haredi way of life, foremost among them the tendency toward halakhic stringency and the rising predominance of written halakhic texts over community and family traditions passed down from generation to generation ([Friedman 1987; 1991](#)). This thesis noted the realization of the Haredi ethos of institutionalized Torah study via political arrangements with governing parties which needed the support of Haredi parties to form ruling coalitions. The society of learners became a fundamental term in the study of Haredi society in Israel, in public discourse about Haredi society, and in how policymakers have viewed it over the last three decades. It became so successful that it is applied to Haredi society in its entirety, even though scholars have noted that its validity as an organizing ethos is largely limited to the Lithuanian-Mitnaged community. Mizrahi and Hasidic Haredim have not adopted it to the same extent, if at all, while some have followed alternative ethos' ([Leon 2010; Wasserman 2015](#)).

Another important conceptualization was provided in the early 1990s by Emmanuel Sivan: The "enclave culture" ([Sivan 1995](#)), which depicted the Haredim as a closed and segregated counter-society and counter-culture, and thus demonstrated the advantages of taking an inter-religious comparative perspective of Haredi society. But this thesis also solidified an overly rigid image of a society that ultimately consists of individuals who frequently veer between the totality in which they were educated and their daily interaction with the reality in which they function.

These historians were joined by scholars of Jewish thought such as Aviezer [Ravitzky \(1996\)](#), who outlined the ideological and theological worldviews of Haredi thinkers and leaders regarding modernity and the Zionist enterprise and provided a conceptual basis for understanding them. These studies formed the dominance of historians, scholars of halakhah, and those of Jewish thought in the scholarly field of Jewish Orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, Israeli Haredi society and life began to attract the attention of social scientists. These included Yosef Shilhav, who explored urban-geographical aspects of Haredim, including Haredi settlement patterns and behavior and management in local government, and Tamar El-Or who conducted ethnographic studies of Haredi women, focusing on women from the Gur Hasidic community ([El-Or 1994](#)). El-Or proposed viewing Haredi women as willing partners in the gender regime in Haredi society, even at the cost of being excluded from patriarchal sources of prestige. She defined them as being simultaneously "educated and ignorant."

From the 1990s onward, the center of gravity of research into Haredi society shifted gradually to social sciences. Over the last three decades, this research has undergone drastic expansion and growth, such that almost every area in the social sciences has now developed a collection of studies focusing on Haredi society. These include, among others, anthropology, communication, geography, political science, psychology, and sociology. Consequently, the examination of the forms of thought that shape Haredi life significantly declined, and attention has shifted to various aspects of Haredi life as it is lived, and to the differences between reality and ideals.

The reactionary conservative backlash to the processes of integration and Israelization in Haredi society and its severity, as well as developments in Israeli government agencies and civil society organizations, led to an agenda of defining Haredi society as a “problem” or a “challenge” thus promoting change in Haredi society. These efforts have led to a rash of studies and policy papers with an applied orientation, often including recommendations for public policymakers as to how to work with and vis-à-vis Haredi society with a view to achieving practical goals in a range of fields, such as road safety, higher education, employment training, and integration into the labor market ([Leon 2020](#)).

We refer to reforms that policymakers and professionals in government ministries and other public agencies are seeking to advance, alongside various civil society organizations and research institutes such as the Joint Distribution Committee, the Israel Democracy Institute, and the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, as well as North American Jewish philanthropic organizations such as the Jewish Federations in New York and California, and the Steinhardt Foundation. Their goal is to promote practical steps that are based on the recommendations of implementation-oriented research studies and policy papers. They mainly seek to explore possible changes to the political agreements reached by Haredi parties during the 1980s and 1990s, which facilitated the insular fortification of Haredi education at the expense of structural poverty and constant dependence on community mechanisms and the welfare state ([Lau 2016](#)). Similarly, they are concerned with the demographic projections described above, according to which the relative size of the Haredi population in Israel will grow significantly in the coming decades. They believe this will have a markedly negative effect on Israel's economy and make the difference between Israel becoming a developed country or, alternatively, classed as a developing country or worse.

These studies and their accompanied recommendations focus mainly on schooling, higher education, employment, and integration into the labor market, with a special focus on including higher percentages of Haredi men in the workforce by means of vocational training or academic study ([Kranzler 2016](#)). When it comes to Haredi women, among whom employment rates are similar to those of non-Haredi women, the emphasis is on upgrading academic skills with a view to increasing diverse occupational opportunities, and on improving their occupational training to help them remain competitive in the labor market. Moreover, these studies aspire to establish Haredi education systems that are subject to government oversight and teach Israeli core curriculum and academic subjects from a relatively early age. In this context, some argue that Haredi society is already experiencing educational and social disintegration due to the penetration of social network culture and to the use of internet and advanced communication technologies. All these are considered to advance and accelerate processes of individual choice and the diversification of Haredi lifestyles, and to undermine the collective discipline that characterizes enclave cultures.

This applied research agenda has uncovered various phenomena in Haredi society, such as the “Modern Haredim,” sometimes defined by researchers as the “Haredi middle class.” This group, it is argued, combines Haredi lifestyles with modern lifestyles, not as a compromise but as a conscious choice ([Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#)). This is a marginal group in terms of numbers ([Malach and Cahaner 2017](#)), but its emergence represents a Haredi social sub-category which is the basis for the development and formation of a more open Haredi identity, particularly in the hands of those interested in promoting change in Haredi society.

The combination of full employment with a strong commitment to the Haredi way of life, while integrating partially or fully into non-Haredi space, is not a new phenomenon in Haredi communities in the United States and England. Most Haredi men in the Jewish diaspora study in yeshiva or *kollel* for a few years before entering higher education or vocational training and subsequently the labor market ([Gonen 2000; 2005](#)). The situation in Israel, in which tens of thousands of young Haredi men defer their military conscription and instead spend many years in Torah study, is unique and unprecedented, and instigating fundamental change in this situation is seen as a major step both by its supporters and its opponents. The prospect of this change drives reactionary forces within Haredi society.

Thus, it appears that contemporary Haredi society in Israel encompasses

reactionary forces on the one hand and modernizing forces on the other, and in between, various shades and sub-shades of communities, groups, and particularly individuals, who construct their Haredi identity not only based on their historical group affiliation but also on their affinity or dis-affinity with these polar forces. The tension between them is keenly felt, and to a great extent is linked to the process coined as “integration without assimilation” ([Caplan and Sivan 2003](#)). It seems that this process is part of what drives both the conservative forces and the modern forces in Haredi society.

A central factor in the development of research on Haredi society in Israel thus concerns the fields and questions which are considered to have practical and applied relevance. While in the past scholars (including those who published policy studies) focused necessarily on the formation of the various streams and groups that make up Haredi society, on understanding ideological worldviews and theological positions, and on decoding communal structures and patterns of social and institutional organization, over the last two decades most of their focus has been on the future of Haredim in Israel and how this future can be shaped and directed by various types of incentives. This is the essence of the transition from mainly theoretical research based on empirical data and primary sources, with the goal of examining research theories and arriving at research conclusions, to applied research aimed at providing data, measures, and methods, with the goal of examining possibilities for instigating change for the better in the Haredi population from a policymaking perspective.

The main research tools for applied and action researchers are quantitative. Their findings are given impressive visual representations and form a platform for constructing scripts and interpretations focused on what is happening in Haredi life, with the aim of inferring a picture of the future and developing a series of recommendations. Concurrently, the gap is growing larger between peer-reviewed theoretical academic studies and policy studies which are sometimes peer-reviewed and sometimes not, and which are often designed to serve a particular practical, ideological, or political agenda. Theoretical discussion is being replaced by public discourse and opinion, and the information being collected about Haredim serves this purpose, while the world of Haredi meaning (including the ethos and narratives that drive it, the religious life that structures it, and the educational work that supports it) is becoming blurred. Thus, an interesting paradox emerges: The more applied knowledge about Haredim we gain, the less attentive we are becoming to Haredi discourse itself.⁴

Scholarly Challenges and Prospects

The applied research studies and collections of data and knowledge contain valuable information about Haredi society, but they tend to suffer from being disconnected from theoretical research and from Haredi discourse in its broadest sense. In addition, their authors are sometimes unaware of the need for these aspects to properly understand their research subjects.

As we have seen, the puzzle of the existence of Haredi society is repeatedly raised, especially when events and developments within it are perceived as formative or critical. Some view these events as catalysts for Haredi society and its leadership to rethink their path, and as an opportunity to promote major change within it.

One example is the puzzle of the economic survival of Haredi society, and of Haredi economy. Most Haredim belong to the lower-middle and lower classes, and Haredi society is classed as poor according to all quantitative scales ([Yaffe-Malovicki 2018](#)). Haredi dependence on government funding is also clear, including both funding for political parties and movements via special budgets and budget lines in various government ministries, and funding for families and individuals in the form of various social security payments and benefits. In recent decades, a series of applied studies and position papers have been published by economists based on various data, including studies by Israel's Ministry of Finance ([Batz and Krill 2019](#)), and these, overall, fail to solve the puzzle of Haredi society's economic viability ([Regev and Gordon 2020](#)). This is a puzzle estimated at least hundreds of millions of New Israeli Shekels annually.

Reality reveals that Haredi society is coping with poverty and consumes resources such as high-quality food products and branded products such as Huggies and Pampers diapers or Coca-Cola and Sprite, which cost more than available alternatives. The same is true of more significant expenses such as owning a car, and the largest expense of all – taking out a mortgage to purchase apartments for young couples. It is not clear how families that are poor according to every available index and are much larger in size than the average in Israel are able to afford apartments for their children. It is also unclear on what basis young Haredi couples are considered eligible for a mortgage, or how to explain the fact that they have a higher rate of meeting their monthly payments to the bank than non-Haredi couples.

Quantitative economic studies have been unable to provide a clear answer to this puzzle, largely because they are based solely on state-official data

collections and their authors have not been able to properly understand the Haredi grey-market economy, the Haredi way of life, and the various Haredi community support systems such as the *gemahim* (cooperative charities providing loans of equipment, funds, and more). Some of these non-profit institutions have annual turnovers in the tens of millions of New Israeli Shekels, acting as small banks, and sometimes also providing a means for tax evasion. They are joined by various donors and fundraising mechanisms, community aid systems (particularly in the Hasidic courts), and more.

The Haredi economy relies on several sources: income from work, some of which is documented and reported as per legal requirements, and some of which is not; government support, including both regular funding provided via budgetary allocations in the state budget and one-time payments; donations from wealthy Haredim in Israel and abroad, from diaspora Haredi communities, and from philanthropic funds and organizations dedicated to aiding the Haredi population; income-bearing assets of various kinds, such as the real estate held by some of the larger Hasidic courts or major investment funds built up over the years; and the above-mentioned *gamachim*, which provide financial or material assistance.

Close familiarity with the Haredi economy and the knowledge required to make use of what it has to offer forms part of the social capital of Haredim and of Haredi social agents and dealmakers. Thus, it seems as though a possible answer to the Haredi economic puzzle lays in ethnographic and qualitative studies which can provide more complex forms of data, such as a clear picture of economic functioning in Haredi families via focus groups, interviews, and participant observations. This may facilitate a deeper understanding of Haredi welfare economy, its boundaries, its social networks, its pockets of deep poverty, and the possibilities available to groups that possess strong social capital. This is a critical puzzle for those who focus on applied research and on recommendations for policymakers, and potential answers to it depend upon sophisticated methods and forms of research.

On a related issue, there may be room to revisit and reassess the proposed thesis about the integration of Haredim into Israeli society and the processes of Israelization that Haredi society is arguably undergoing. Alternatively, it might be worthwhile to refine this thesis and to examine more closely where it is supported by evidence and in which life areas the picture is different or contradictory.

Another puzzle concerns the ability of Haredi society to overcome historic

tensions and deep cultural divides, and to create a shared and relatively strong Haredi identity; that is, to maintain the enclave culture. A prominent example is the relations between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. In the non-Haredi majority culture in Israel, there has been ethnic mixing for quite some time, and the number of couples in which one partner is of Sephardi origin and the other of Ashkenazi origin is no smaller than the number of couples in which both partners are either of Ashkenazi or Sephardi origin. At the same time, the question of ethnic tensions between Israelis whose background lies in Arabic countries and those with European origins remains a feature of public discourse in Israel, because this division is under constant national scrutiny and because it serves various political and other interests.

By contrast, this division is granted institutional, cultural, and sometimes ideological legitimacy in Haredi society, which remains the only sector in Israel in which the rates of ethnically mixed marriage are very low. It would be worth examining whether the ethnic separation in Haredi society expresses conflict, as it has been perceived and analyzed thus far, or, possibly, agreement.

Another related issue is the role of relations between Haredim and non-Haredim in forming Haredi identity and consciousness. We know quite a bit about Haredi attitudes toward the state and towards non-Haredim, but Haredi identity and consciousness are formed through discourse, contact, and negotiations with the surrounding non-Haredi majority society. Because we lack a systematic examination of the attitude of the state toward Haredim and of non-Haredi society toward its Haredi counterpart, we cannot provide a balanced characterization of Haredi identity and consciousness.

For example, views of Haredim in Israeli society range from admiration and seeing Haredi Judaism as a source of inspiration and an authentic expression of Judaism, to disgust and opinions laced with prejudice and negative stereotypes. The tension between inspiration and prejudice, between admiration and fear, has yet to receive proper attention in research on Haredim and Haredi society in Israel. Israeli public discourse in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown just how essential this topic is.

Moreover, relations between Haredi society and the State of Israel are usually described in ideological, theological, and political terms. For example, the argument with Zionism over whether belonging to the Jewish people should be defined based solely on religious principles, or whether definitions of belonging based on non-religious national criteria are equally legitimate. Consequently, much research has focused on examining interactions in the political arena. It

seems we ought to add to these dimensions an exploration of relations using a civil model. This would include, for example, social developments in daily life within the Haredi and non-Haredi populations, and not just the discourse and interactions among the religious and political elites. Similarly, Haredi society in Israel should be viewed as linked to Haredi communities in other countries; that is, as a local sector that operates in broader international communal networks, one that complements and challenges local civil life.

In support of this idea, it is worth noting that the events of the COVID-19 pandemic have emphasized the importance of civil life in the equation of the relations between Haredi society and the State of Israel and Israeli society. Alongside carefully worded Haredi proclamations accepting the civic authority of the state and attesting to a sense of mutual responsibility and common destiny which have been made during this period, the holding of large-scale Haredi events such as weddings and funerals were seen not just as an expression of devotion to a particularly communal way of life but also as a civil-political display of independent sovereignty, and in some cases, as an expression of the existence of a Haredi autonomy within the State of Israel.

A great number of social science studies over the last two decades are based on the premise that Haredi society in Israel is undergoing many changes, and others repeatedly note in their discussions and conclusions various change and renewal processes in various areas of Haredi life. The tendency to focus on changes is closely aligned with the trend of applied research and policy recommendations regarding which changes should be encouraged or accelerated in Haredi society, and how they should be implemented. But it seems as though areas of Haredi life in which continuity prevails, not change, have been neglected or ignored. These include the Lithuanian yeshivas and kollelim, which are making an enormous effort to safeguard their study content and not to allow any significant changes, neither with regards to the program Torah study itself, nor to the possibility of introducing studies in other fields of knowledge.

Similarly, the characteristics of the revered figures in the Lithuanian yeshiva world would seem not to have changed substantially, even if the lifestyles of many Haredim have changed. Some of the articles in this book reveal foci of continuity in which there is no evidence of significant change, and some of them support claims that in certain areas of Haredi life, there is a shift towards separation and isolation rather than integration. Two relevant examples are the patterns of Haredi geography and settlement and approaches to and consumption of health and medicine. Moreover, there are areas in which there have been

changed processes that were shrouded under a veil of continuity, though these require a separate discussion.

Finally, Haredi society indeed consists of tens of groups and sub-groups that have a certain epigenetic commonality but are yet very different from one another. Most scholars of this society are aware of this fact, which is well reflected in their studies. Some focus on a particular group, some carefully sample streams and groups, with a view to providing a balanced picture, some examine views and ideas among different groups for the same reason, and so on. The understanding that group affiliation and identity are very important to the study subjects, sometimes more than their affiliation to the broader Haredi “family,” has found its way into the mainstream of scholarship. At the same time, several articles in this volume, including those of Netta Gilboa-Feldman, Chaya Gershoni, and Ahuva Spitz, Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahr, and Elisheva Rosman show that group affiliations and identities are not necessarily relevant for every topic, or for every aspect of a particular topic.

The importance of undertaking a complex examination that includes non-Haredi aspects and individual group aspects is also underlined by looking at the ethos of obedience to rabbinical authority and the unconditional acceptance of *Da’at Torah*. These are central values and formational educational ethos’ in every group and sub-group in Haredi society, each applying them in their own way. The subject of obedience to religious authority has gained prominence since the outbreak of the coronavirus, as an effective tool for combating the spread of the pandemic on the one hand, and on the other hand, as an expression of the price of obedience in situations in which leaders failed to understand the seriousness of the situation and the immediate consequences of their decisions for the infection and mortality rates in Haredi society. At one and the same time, there were Haredim who chose not to follow the instructions of their leaders, and Haredim who saw the emerging situation as a danger to the absolute status of authority granted to religious leadership in the face of alternative sources of authority, whether governmental or medical.

Moreover, it appears as though while there are formational values and ethos’ calling for obedience to religious leaders, this is not a uniform position. At the head of each of the many groups in Haredi society is a leader whose instructions are closely followed by the group members, and certainly the most committed among them. That is, there are many expressions of *Da’at Torah*, and these often contradict one another.

There is no pretense in this volume to resolve these puzzles, crossroads,

complexities, and somewhat contradicting currents and developments. But the authors do address these scholarly challenges both directly and indirectly, and thus do offer observations, promote our understanding, and rule out various notions.

A Polyphony of Voices, a Gallery of Pictures

Haredi society should be viewed from as many perspectives as possible as, like all human societies, it contains countless layers, dimensions, and aspects. This is equally true of this society's members, institutions, leaders, and worldviews. However it is impossible to include all perspectives in one volume, and aiming to provide an up-to-date picture of the major and groundbreaking research foci, we have chosen to focus on certain subjects. Each of the chapters in this book focuses on a particular field and combines research findings with an assessment of the current state of the field, and a description of topics that still need to be studied.

Viewing Haredi society from different perspectives produces a complex picture, often with contradictory and confusing aspects that invite further questions. This complexity is also reflected in the previous sections of this introductory chapter.

First, it should be noted in general that Benjamin Brown's article on Haredi worldviews, a subject that is at the ideological and moral core of Haredi society and that Haredim would argue is essential for understanding what guides their conduct, and the ideological-political platforms of Haredi political parties provided by Benyamin Neuberger, present the desirable from the Haredi point of view, while the rest of the articles examine various aspects of Haredi life as it is lived.

Many groups in Haredi society tend to emphasize their ideological worldview as what defines them, far more than their patterns of behavior or their lifestyles. This is undoubtedly a central anchor, some would argue *the* central anchor, in their outlook and in how they wish to be perceived, and Benjamin Brown's comprehensive survey fills this important role. As he demonstrates, these Haredi worldviews are not always clearly and systematically formulated, and thus need to be reconstructed in any attempt to provide a clear picture of the foundations of Haredi ideology. This is a field that in many respects is a framework and a tool for simultaneously both shaping the reality of Haredi life and interpreting that reality, and it often provides the platform for Haredi moral-educational agendas.

Brown provides a complex picture, in which no single view or approach is fully shared by all.

There are strong associations between Haredi political movements and group-social identities in Haredi society, as the platforms of these parties demonstrate. Suffice it to note that except for a brief period during which Ariel Sharon (1928–2014) was prime minister, Haredi parties have been members of the governing coalition since 1977, and their representatives have served as ministers and deputy ministers. Benyamin Neuberger's article presents an overview of the Agudat Israel, Poalei Agudat Israel, and Shas parties, thus shedding light on other aspects of the desirable Israeli State and society, and the various Haredi visions and potential goals.

The roots of the complex political relationships between Haredi parties and representatives and those of the various components of Jewish society go back to 19th-century East European Jewish society and, later, Mandatorial Palestine. But the challenges these relationships faced in the wake of the establishment of State of Israel were unprecedented in many ways, and one of several examples is military service of Haredim. This sensitive and highly charged issue in Israeli society has been part of its relations with Haredi society since 1948 and even earlier, as there were Haredim who were members of the Jewish underground, served in the Palmah, and volunteered to fight for Jerusalem when the city was under siege in 1948. Elisheva Rosman offers a multi-perspective examination of this subject, which clearly shows its complex and sensitive nature. As she clearly illustrates, both politics and military service are not restricted to the political scene and no less directly linked to the public discourse in various Israeli socio-cultural settings and in Haredi society, and to the discourse between them.

Similar to army service, Haredi education is situated at the crossroads between Haredi ideology, its spiritual and political leadership, rank-and-file Haredim, and a cause for tension between Haredi and non-Haredi Israeli Jewish societies. In addition, the Haredi education system offers an interesting measure for processes of change and continuity in Haredi society, and in this sense, the picture that emerges is highly complicated and uneven. There are some areas in which change, at times far-reaching, is happening, while in others a great effort is being expended to prevent any change whatsoever. Thus far the scholarly focus on this huge system has been devoted to typologies of institutions and content taught in them, but its interfaces with public policy, government, and the law have for the most part overlooked. Lotem Perry-Hazan brings these aspects to the forefront of research and offers some important and innovative insights.

In Israel, geographical distribution is often linked to political, group, and sub-culture identities, as can be seen from various analyses of voting patterns in national elections. Haredi society seems no exception to this pattern although this is yet to be explored systematically, and the grounds for such a study lay in a wide-ranging nonetheless nuanced survey of the geographical distribution of Haredi society in Israel. Lee Cahaner provides this complex distribution which goes way beyond the classic focus on cities and neighborhoods that have been and remain identified with Haredi society for decades, such as Bnei Brak, the Jerusalem neighborhoods of Geula and Mea Shearim, Immanuel, and Modi'in Illit. This broad examination of the patterns of Haredi settlement and residence reveals a center-periphery dynamic, both in spatial terms and in self-perception, as well as various developments such as the establishment in recent decades of Haredi cities over the Green Line and close to Arab towns and villages.

Much of the internal discourse in Haredi society is conducted in the media, and Haredi society has a variety of media outlets, some of which are identical to those found in other societies, whereas others are unique. These include newspapers with a clear ideological-party-political affiliation and orientation; licensed and pirate radio stations; journals; weekly Torah portion leaflets distributed for free in synagogues on Shabbat and on holydays; and street posters. These media are very distinct in their guidelines, their conduct, and their consumption. For example, the underlying assumption that consumers are familiar and inverse with the world of classical Jewish texts, allowing the use of associative expressions as a means of transmitting both overt and covert messages, or the reliance of some of these media outlets on a council or religious authority charged with censoring, authorizing or outlawing its publication. Rivka Neriya-Ben Shahr provides a comprehensive survey of the complex media arena in a conservative religious society which in some ways is morally opposed to the use of certain forms of media and communication.

While the field of mental health care in Haredi society has attracted considerable scholarly attention, not so is the case regarding healthcare in general. There have been some studies on specific topics, such as vitamin D deficiency among Haredim (seemingly as a result of the dress code which reduces exposure to the sun's rays that are the main human source of this vitamin), but there has been no broad examination of the field of medicine and healthcare in Haredi society. Moreover, those studies that do exist look at medical aspects, and not at the interfaces between medicine, sociology, and anthropology. Netta Gilboa-Feldman, Chaya Gershoni, and Ahuva Spitz provide

a groundbreaking survey of this complex and multifaceted arena, examining it from various perspectives.

Conclusion: “No Man Is a Prophet in His Own City”

The field of scholarly study of Israeli Haredi society has undergone significant change over the past few decades, from an emphasis on history, theology and halakhah to an emphasis on social science, and thus, from being at the margins of academic discourse in Israel, it has become a much-in-demand subject for academic courses and among research students. This merits an up-to-date critical account of Haredi society from multi-disciplinary points of view, even if it does not cover the full scholarly disciplinary gamut.

Israeli Haredi society has also undergone significant changes since the 1970s. It has shifted from being a dependent society to one whose political and other representatives are now in positions of power and influence; from a society with an oppositional stance, a counter-culture, to a society with dimensions of partnership and integration; and from a minority society fearful for its continued existence to one that projects self-confidence, strength, and vitality. This also merits a relevant account, even if partial.

The changes within Haredi society have long-term implications for Israeli society, and particularly for its middle classes. Until a few decades ago, the Israeli middle classes were largely homogeneous, composed mainly of European Jews and their offspring. With the expansion of higher education, we evidence growing mobility from the social periphery to the center, and consequently, the Israeli middle classes are becoming more diverse and encompassing more and more representatives of groups that in the past were either not represented in the middle classes or were on their margins. Examples include Mizrahi Jews, Arabs, and Religious Zionist Jews. This trend is leading to increasing friction between the sub-societies that make up Israeli society, as reflected among other things in the political instability that has characterized Israel over the last decade.

The story of Haredi society is an important element in questions about the future of this complicated situation. From a “Zionist” perspective, the Haredim are the last large Jewish migrant group that is being invited to join the Jewish state and participate not as a separate sector, enjoying the fruits of a certain degree of political symbiosis, but as a responsible partner playing its part in national tasks. But this invitation comes with an awkward price tag from a Haredi perspective: It is a partnership that means abandoning the long-held

ideological and theological opposition to the Zionist enterprise, and abandoning the counter-cultural stance.

Answering these questions means attempting to predict the future of Haredi society, and as we have seen, several such prophecies failed. In contrast, scholars of Haredi society have succeeded thus far to document and explain its past and the trends and developments within it at the present. These failures have taught us how dynamic, surprising, and topsy-turvy the future can be, and thus it would seem a wiser course to wait and see how Haredi society and Israeli society in general develop over the next few decades.

Notes

1. [Two preliminary terminological notes are in order: The first relates to the term “Haredim.” Social scientists often tend to use the term “Ultra-Orthodox,” while historians and humanities scholars prefer the term “Haredim.” Our preference for “Haredim” is due both to the fact that this is the term used by the members of this community, and to the fact that “Ultra-Orthodox” is laden with a form of value judgment, in that they are considered more Orthodox than “regular” Orthodox Jews. The second note relates to the word “Palestine,” which is used by some scholars, while others prefer “Eretz Yisrael.” Since “Palestine” was the formal name of this area while under British Mandatory rule, we contend that it is preferable, but emphasize that this choice does not infer any form of political or ideological stance.](#)
2. [Haredi society is one of the oldest members of the family of fundamentalist groups \(Marty and Appleby 1991\), with which it shares several epigenetic characteristics.](#)
3. [See Brown 2017, 24–33; Caplan 2003, 225–228; Friedman 1991, 6–26; Heilman and Friedman 1991, 198–206.](#)
4. [For a somewhat different view of these studies, see Lee Cahaner's article in this volume.](#)

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1 The Fundamental Components of Haredi Ideology (*Hashkafah*)¹

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Introduction

Haredi *hashkafah* was formed over the generations via the encounter between various fundamental ideational approaches, some more methodical than others, and the realities in which they were supposed to be enacted.² Some of these approaches were characteristic of particular figures or groups, but some can be considered as part of a general Haredi ideational foundation. This foundation includes the basic view of the world and the basic values of all the individuals and groups within Haredi Jewry, except some outliers, and it is the bedrock on which internal discourse among them takes place.

Using a metaphor from biology, one can say that social conditions serve as a stimulus to which different people may respond differently; the form of the response to the stimulus is determined by (among other factors) the individual's fundamental ideas. Thus, to gain a full understanding of this process we must analyze both the stimulus and the ideational foundation that influences the response. In this sense, socio-historical analysis and ideational-halakhic analysis complement one another; by contrast, focusing solely on sociological and anthropological aspects risks missing a vital part of the picture.

It is not easy to describe this shared ideational foundation. First, Haredi *hashkafah* is not formulated in methodological analytical essays, but appears in

endless little sayings and expressions, most of them made in response to contemporary events. However, I have already argued in various contexts that it is certainly possible to distill Haredi *hashkafah* from these sayings, and to uncover its underlying premises as an “indeliberate theology.”

Haredi Judaism today is split by two cross-cutting divisions: the first is the religious division into three main streams of Hasidic, Lithuanian-Mitnagdic (henceforth Lithuanian), and Sephardi Haredim; here, it should be noted that the Lithuanian contribution to the formulation of the *hashkafah* is particularly prominent, and thus most of the quotations below are from members of this community. The second is the ideological-political division, particularly with regard to Zionism and the State of Israel, and here too there are three main streams: radical Haredi Judaism, headed by the Satmar Hasidic community, along with the *Edah Haharedit* in Jerusalem and its various factions, among others *Neturei Karta*; mainstream Haredi Judaism, its critical mass, historically represented by the Agudat Israel party and today by United Torah Judaism; and the various elements of moderate Haredi Judaism, whose most prominent representative in the past was the Poalei Agudat Israel (PAI) movement, and today is represented mainly by Shas and Habad, who take a very different line from PAI.

While it is difficult to include all these groups and factions under a single ideological umbrella, there is an additional problem: Haredim are not particularly good at expressing their ideology in a clear and organized fashion, partly because they have a somewhat dismissive stance toward undertakings of this kind. The average Haredi Jew will say that his *hashkafah* comprises the 13 principles of faith formed by Maimonides and that Haredi Judaism has nothing new to add to those. But this is a problematic description, as these principles also have non-Haredi interpretations, while the Haredim also emphasize other principles that were not discussed by Maimonides.

We are therefore faced with a creative task: to distill and formulate from these truncated sayings an organized dogma, even in those areas in which its proponents struggled to express it clearly. This analysis reveals that Haredi Judaism has a series of main principles. Going even further, we see that these can be reduced to two: “Faith in the sages” and “the decline of the generations.” In a somewhat irreverent manner, we could perhaps claim that these are the 14th and 15th principles of faith that Haredi Judaism appended to Maimonides. These two core principles complement one another and sometimes balance each other out. I, therefore, begin with them and afterward explain how the other principles

stem from them, whether directly or indirectly.

Faith in the Sages in Halakhah and in “Any Issue in the World”

Faith in the sages is the belief in the authority of Jewish sages down the ages. The only place in which this term appears in the Jewish canon is in the *Mishnah* (*Avot* 3:5) where it is listed as one of the 48 means by which Torah is acquired, and its meaning is not entirely clear from the text. It is commonly used in rabbinic literature to refer to the belief in the authority of the sages in each generation to interpret the Torah and to rule on halakhah, that is, as a recognition of the validity of the oral law. However, its meaning has expanded over the years.

The first to expand its meaning was the Hasidic movement, which used “faith in the sages” to refer to the authority and power of Hasidic leaders to act as spiritual leaders and to instruct their followers how to act, a meaning that went far beyond the limits of halakhic issues to include these leaders’ authority in the public sphere as well as in numerous aspects of their followers’ private lives. Over the course of the 20th century, the Lithuanian community developed a similar idea and coined it *Da’at Torah* (literally “Torah knowledge,” “the Torah’s opinion,” or “Torah mind”). This doctrine awards great Torah scholars the authority to rule on “any issue in the world, in general, and in particular,” a saying attributed to Rabbi Israel Meir Hachohen of Radin (1839–1933), known as the *Hafetz Hayim* ([Greineman 1972](#), 30).³ From that point on, the obligation to obey those imbued with *Da’at Torah* was also wrapped up in the concept of “faith in the sages,” and in effect became its main element.

The aforementioned term in the Mishna became a prized value of the Haredi *hashkafah*, and some of the most prominent Haredi leaders minced no words in emphasizing its importance. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847–1905), the second leader of the Gur Hasidic court, stated that “faith in the sages is the foundation of the Torah” ([Alter 1934–1936](#), II); Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1892–1953), a highly influential musar instructor of the Ponovezh yeshiva, defined it as “the root of everything” ([Dessler 1984](#)); Rabbi Yaakov Israel Kanievsky (1899–1985), known as the *Steipler*, teaches that it is “one of the foundations of faith in our holy Torah” ([Kanievsky 1957](#), Introduction); Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1899–2001) ruled that it was “one of the foundations on which our tradition is built” ([Shach 1988](#), 17); Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch refers to it as “one of the main principles and foundations of the Torah” ([Sternbuch](#)

[1987](#), III, 118); and Rabbi Yosef Avraham Wolf (1911–1979), a highly influential educator who molded generations of young Haredi women, sees it as the “foundation of foundations” ([Wolf 1981](#)).

Contrary to certain claims, this doctrine was not created *ex nihilo*. Even before the crisis of modernity, in traditional Jewish society up until the 18th century, the outstanding Torah scholars were always a social elite and were in any case involved in public and even personal questions as well as Torah matters. Although the pre-modern Jewish community created institutions with “civil” authority alongside rabbinical authority, such as the *kahal* or the “seven good men of the city” (Babylonian Talmud, Megilah, 26b), only occasionally were precise definitions given of the boundaries of that authority. Moreover, according to halakhah, any rulings of the *kahal* required the approval of “an important person,” namely a Torah scholar, in order to gain binding status.

But, there is no doubt that the doctrine of *Da’at Torah* does represent a significant expansion of the boundaries of rabbinical authority and of the extent of its validity. First, it gave it a conceptualization and ideational basis that it lacked in the traditional pre-modern society. Second, it institutionalized it by means of the “Council of Great Torah Sages” created by Agudat Israel, and the various councils of sages formed in imitation of this forum in Haredi politics since the 1980s. And third, it did indeed lead to an expansion of rabbinical authority into every area of life, while also railing against Zionist and other trends that sought to keep rabbis out of the public arena and limit them to religious issues, as Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) wrote, “We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples” ([Herzl 1946](#), 146).

This expansion did not come at the expense of the core element of faith in halakhic authority. It is the great halakhic authorities (*poskim*) who are allowed to interpret halakhah and instruct others in it. The belief in the authority of the major *poskim* to lay down the law provides the surety that halakhic innovation will remain within the “zone of legitimacy” ([Barak 1987](#), 12), borrowing a legal theoretical term, of halakhic tradition. I expand on this issue later in the chapter.

Who is considered a “great” sage or jurist? In halakhah, as interpreted in Orthodox and Haredi discourse, the “halakhic authorities of the generation” (*poskei hador*) are those who have been recognized by the rabbinical elite as worthy to discuss and rule on halakhah, due to a combination of extensive Torah knowledge with a God-fearing character and commitment to the “truth of the Torah.” The belief in the authority of the great *poskim* is thus the belief that they are the continuation of the chain of the transmission of oral law (*ma’atikei*

hashemuah), “those who pass on the word” as phrased in contemporary popular Lithuanian discourse.

But there is not necessarily an overlap between the great *poskim* and the great sages who express *Da’at Torah*. While both titles were indeed held in the previous generation by Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (1910–2012) and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1910–2013), this has not always happened, and it is not always the case today. For example, several Hasidic leaders are not outstanding *poskim*; they almost always owe their status to their lineage, and thus the “great figures” in this stream are mainly those who lead the largest Hasidic communities in Israel, such as Gur, Belz, and Vizhnitz. In the Lithuanian and Sephardi Haredi communities there is no such dynastic mechanism, and leaders are expected to earn their status via recognition of their greatness from the rabbinical elite. However, the process via which this recognition is bestowed often involves political fixers, journalists, and other influencers of public opinion. Needless to say, this might be considered improper from the perspective of pure *hashkafah*, but overall Haredim understand that there is a gap between ideals and reality and tend to accept this state of affairs.

The Decline of the Generations: The Fundamental Principle of All Conservatism

The decline of the generations (*yeridat hadorot*) suggests that every generation is lesser than its predecessors in wisdom, fear of God, and all other worthy human characteristics. Occasionally, we even find the claim that this decline also affects physical attributes ([Landa, 1995](#)). This is a fundamental concept of history that is common to all traditional or quasi-traditional societies ([Friedman 1991b](#), 24), and it stands in stark opposition to the doctrine of progress that was a central pillar of most modern ideologies in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

The development of this idea and its transformation into a “principle of faith” is undoubtedly tied to Haredi counter-reactions to these modern ideologies. The ideational struggle between the two streams of thought is playfully described by Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (1878–1953), known by the acronym *Hazon Ish*, arguably the most prominent leader of Haredi Jewry in Israel after the Holocaust:

The earlier ones say, “We are wiser than you, and the generations become

lesser and lesser; the hearts [wisdom] of the earlier ones were like the doorway of the Temple, while the hearts of the later ones are like the eye of a needle.” The later ones whisper in mocking tones: “The earlier ones were unpractical people, they had no links with other countries, they knew nothing of different parts of the globe, they ate natural food and wore simple wool clothing. Even their wars were fought with swords and spears, with bows and slingshots. We have laid railroads around the globe, created the telegraph, the telephone and the radio; we have turned all the individuals into one family, all the world's wise people are convened together, and the world is a single great city before us. We have built great towers in the sky, we are lighter than eagles in the heavens, we have built many factories to manufacture objects of which our fathers had not dreamed, and we have forged weapons, bombs that can destroy worlds, that can wipe out thousands and tens of thousands. It is beneath our dignity to compete with the earlier ones who lacked all this; would a giant compete with a dwarf?”

([Karelitz 1997](#), 5, 1)

Karelitz's derision for the pretenses of the “later ones” is clear in the ironic tone he uses. However, he subsequently devotes a lengthy discussion to demonstrating the case of the “earlier ones” and the error of the “later ones.”

The doctrine of generational decline is strongly rooted in the canon of rabbinic literature, and it grew into a feature of Jewish literature of the Middle Ages and modernity, in both halakhic and philosophical works. It finds expression in such well-known phrases as “the generations grow lesser,” or “if the earlier ones were angels, we are humans; and if the earlier ones were humans, we are as donkeys” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, 112b), or “the hearts [wisdom] of the early sages were like the doorway of the Temple, of the later sages were like the doorway to the sanctuary, and we are like the eye of a needle” (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin, 53a). Various Jewish thinkers have explained this historical logic in different ways: some have connected it to the decline that has affected the entire world since the sin of Adam ([Finkel 1978](#), Vol. 1, 12–13; Vol. 2, 213–214; [Horowitz 1648](#), Introduction, 35b); while others argue that the great truth was revealed to us at Mount Sinai, and that the further we progress along the axis of time, the further we travel away from that truth ([Gerondi 1959](#), 127–128; [Schick 1985](#), 1, 1, 7). This approach is very much in opposition to the modern idea that truth is not revealed to us and instead is an ideal somewhere in the infinite future, and thus as we pass through time we get closer and closer to this ideal truth.

To be sure, the concept of the decline of the generations was accepted in the traditional Jewish world well before the crisis of modernity and the appearance of Orthodoxy, but other ideas served to moderate it, and sometimes to neutralize it completely ([Melamed 2003](#); [Ta Shma 1979–1980](#); [Leiman 1993](#); [Levine 1978](#)). Thus, in Halakhah there is an accepted rule that halakhah “is ruled according to the most recent opinion” (*hilkhata kevatraei*), which awards authority to later generations of jurists, while in Jewish thought there are also expressions of the idea of historical progress.⁴

In general, these ideas were justified with the claim that while later generations are lesser than earlier generations and owe them much, the later generations are able to benefit also from the wisdom of their predecessors, and not the other way round. This argument has sometimes been likened to a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant: the dwarf may be smaller, but he sees further.

The Haredi *hashkafah* has continued the idea of generational decline and defended it zealously. In response to modern claims of historical progress, Haredi thinkers have raised a series of counterarguments. First and foremost is the argument that man is not to be measured by his scientific and technological achievements but rather by his moral and religious achievements, and in this, recent generations certainly fall short of their predecessors. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914–2005) thus argues that technology has only dulled man's senses and feelings toward the world around him ([Wolbe 1986](#), 67–68). This combination of the decline of morals and the rise of technology, claims Rabbi Hayim Friedlander (1923–1986), has made man more harmful and dangerous than ever: he learned to control nature before he learned to control himself ([Friedlander 1994](#), 63–64). Similar ideas were written by Rabbi Shach regarding the nuclear arms race ([Shach 1990](#), 109–110).

In a similar vein, Rabbi Karelitz claims that while man has the advantage of “wisdom,” real wisdom lies not in science and technology but in the study of Torah and the religious achievements. “The advantage of wisdom is in theoretical knowledge [i.e. mathematics in Medieval Hebrew], and one should not take the applied sciences and place them on the [other arm of the] scale, for ... the way that men use them for their earthly material purposes adds no honor or elevation to the wise, heaven-dwelling soul” ([Karelitz 1997](#), 5, 2). When the first man walked on the moon, Rabbi Shach wrote: “Here on earth is the place for man to grow in wisdom and to know God, which is the greatest wisdom of all.” He continues that the moon landings should not over-impress us at the

power of man, but rather evoke in us a sense of the “nothingness of man compared to all of creation, for he has not yet reached the slightest amount of the wisdom of creation “([Shach 1988](#), 123).

Thus, Haredi thinkers mostly acknowledge the advantage of later generations when it comes to applied science and technology but prefer to downplay the worth of this progress. However, they do sometimes even dispute this progress itself. Karelitz, for example, raises the possibility that in these fields, too, earlier generations were greater than us: some of their wisdom was lost, and even the relics that remain, such as mummies and the pyramids, reflect ancient capabilities that are not fully understood by modern man ([Karelitz 1997](#), 5, 2). Both him and Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam (1905–1994), the leader of Sanz-Kleusenbergs Hasidic court, claim that some of the ancients could undoubtedly have come up with modern inventions, but consciously refrained from doing so due to a sense of moral responsibility, in light of their potential for great destruction ([Halberstam 1980](#), 173).

Like other Haredi figures, Karelitz also uses the idea of “dwarves on the shoulders of giants,” without deploying the imagery of the metaphor itself: “The wisdom of later generations is founded on that of earlier generations ... and most of the glory belongs to those who came first and did not receive the keys as an inheritance. With their generosity and their great talent, they opened the gates of wisdom; not so the later generations, who entered through open gates” ([Karelitz 1997](#), 5, 2). Note the shift made in this idea: while in the Middle Ages, this metaphor was used to emphasize the advantage of more recent generations, who can see further, Karelitz uses it to emphasize the importance of their predecessors, while later generations are nothing but dwarves.

Notwithstanding the overall notion of decline, claims of progress do sometimes appear in Haredi thought. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), leader of Habad-Lubavitch Hasidim, was full of wonder at scientific and technological progress and saw it as a blessing for humanity in general, and in particular for the service of the Lord ([Schneerson 1992](#)). The Hassidic leader of Slonim, Rabbi Shalom Noah Berezovsky (1911–2000), was impressed at the rise in Torah study and religious observance: “The generations are growing greater, as sons surpass their fathers in Torah learning and devoutness, and this trend is growing, as we see how elementary and secondary religious schools and yeshivot are being built in a way and at a pace never seen before” ([Berezovsky 1988](#), 28).

Indeed, Berezovsky almost abandons the principle entirely: “If it was always

known that generations decline, and in recent generations there has been a terrible falling away, amounting to an avalanche ... then in our generation ... we are witness to a rise of the generations in certain aspects” (Berezovsky 1988, 29). To be clear, those “certain aspects” are not just minor details, but the most important issues in Berezovsky's own priorities, so that the use of this terminology helps him to avoid a head-on denunciation of the principle of generational decline. Berezovsky explains this surprising “rise of the generations” as being due to the sacrifice made by the victims of the Holocaust, who sanctified God's name, having brought an unusual quantity of holiness into the world. In any case, opinions such as these are unusual, and the dominant vein of Haredi thought repeatedly emphasizes the decline of the generations.

Halakhic Conservatism: The Rejection of Reform and Modernization of Halakhah

We now come to other principles, closely connected to the two principles reviewed above, and sometimes even derived from them. The principle of halakhic conservatism postulates that halakhah should be preserved in its traditional form and that there is no room for changes or “amendments” to it. This principle is frequently justified with the argument that the divine word is eternal, and “this is the Torah and it shall not be replaced”; however, Haredim do acknowledge that early Sages during the Geonic and Medieval periods ruled and delivered creative halakhic decisions more than rabbis of recent generations have done.

The lack of authority afforded more recent sages to take similar actions stems from the principle of “the decline of the generations.” It is also due to the recognition that in recent generations, unlike in the past, the calls for changes in Halakhah are driven by a reformist ideology that seeks to adapt Judaism to the values of modernity, rather than by any truly exigent circumstances. These calls express an attempt to undermine tradition and a desire to “amend” it, and thus they are tainted with a lack of basic fear of God. Rabbinic tradition is already a perfect product, says Rabbi Moses Sofer (1762–1839), known as the *Hatam Sofer*, in response to Reform proposals for changes to the prayer book, and thus we should preserve it rather than seek to amend it:

We know that in Second Temple times, the People of Israel dwelled in their land holding a scepter of greatness and honor for several centuries. In those

days they had great sages who invested all their time in Torah study, they and their thousands of students, and they had study houses (*batei midrash*) that were larger and better than any university of our times, and had the Grand Court (*Sanhedrin*) and authorities who set boundaries and made new enactments. These were followed by thousands and tens of thousands of students, right down to our Holy Rabbi [Yehuda Hanasi] who authored the Mishnah. And of all these sages, only a few were mentioned in the Mishnah and the Beraita, and of the teachings of the sages who lived over several centuries only a few texts of each are cited, and the same is true of the teachings of the Amoraim in the two Talmuds. This is only because their words were carefully selected as by one who selects the very best out of the best foods, or who separates and winnows and sieves in order to get clean flour ... And now, that we have these words, which came from the mouths of sages whose hearts were larger than the doorway to the Sanctuary and were refined time and again over hundreds of years by thousands of sages, and were implanted within the nation for almost two thousand years, opposed by no-one—will we allow small, Exile-blinded foxes come to breach their walls and destroy their fences, and change the words of the prayers and blessings that they had enacted, and alter the times they fixed for us?! And if it comes to judgement, no court can overrule another court unless it is greater in number and in wisdom ... And where is the wisdom of those to have them qualify as greater in number and in wisdom?

([Sofer 1973](#), Ch. 6, 84)

This approach does not mean that any innovation or development in halakhah should be blocked. In contrast to a prevailing perception in certain circles, halakhah has undergone several changes in the 20th century which are almost revolutionary. Unlike the authorities of the 19th century, many of whom expressed opposition not only to modern values but also to modern technology, the leading authorities of the second half of the 20th century have shown great interest in questions of medicine and technology and have taken giant strides in advancing these areas of halakhah. Prominent among them have been Rabbis Moshe Feinstein (1895–1986) in the United States, and Eliezer Waldenberg (1915–2006), Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1910–1995), and Ovadia Yosef in Israel.

In parallel, there was intensive development of the field of halakhah relating to The Land of Israel (*Eretz Israel*), including various agricultural issues such as

the Sabbatical Year (*shmitah*) and tithes (*trumah* and *ma'aser*), which was the subject of extensive discussion in the Mishnaic and Talmudic literature, remained largely untouched for around 1,500 years. The role of Rabbi Karelitz in reviving this field is particularly noteworthy.

Moreover, even in more traditional halakhic areas, there have been some fascinating developments, as alongside a series of stricter rulings there have also been many lenient rulings, although the majority of these have not been widely accepted in the Haredi community, as we shall see later on. Thus, while Rabbi Sofer's known statement that "the New is forbidden by the Torah," which became the motto of radical Hungarian Orthodoxy, also appears among wider Haredi circles, it seems as though most Orthodox decisors have chosen not to adopt it, at least not in its extreme sense.

Where does the border lie between legitimate Orthodox development of halakhah and illegitimate Reform? There is no simple algorithm or measurable criteria that can answer this question. Ultimately, the test is not only textual since the Reform and Conservative movements sought to anchor their rulings in halakhic sources. The great Haredi Torah scholars are well aware that interpretation can be used to arrive at any conclusion one desires, "for there is no end to the minute parsing of text, and any person can challenge the argument of his fellow, and in turn his fellow can challenge his fellow's challenges," as Sofer put it. He argues that the rabbis compared the opinions of later sages to a finger stuck into wax, because "just as a finger in wax can be molded to whoever desire, so are the later opinions not strong and solid, because every man will turn his opinion toward what his heart desires" ([Sofer 1973](#), ch. 6, 85).

Thus, the attitude to innovation in halakhah is frequently determined not by the "what" but rather by "who" is making the proposal, and what are his motives, and "the heart knows whether the intention is to make straight [for good purposes] or to pervert [for bad] (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 26a)." This decision is entrusted to the great sages of the generation, who are not only experts in halakhah but have also internalized and embody the spirit of the Torah and the limits to its interpretation, and who have gained a keen intuition or even holy spirit that common people do not possess. Thus, this determination is based on the "faith in the sages." Consequently, a Haredi decisor will be willing to accept a lenient halakhic interpretation which seeks to address true distress of God-fearing Jews but will be entirely resistant to any such interpretation if it reflects an adoption of the *Zeitgeist* and an attempt at realignment with the values of modernity. Such interpretations are essentially an expression of a lack

of fear of the Lord and a weak commitment to the authority and validity of the tradition, and they must be resisted.

Haredi conservatism is a rare phenomenon in the modern world. It is common to present Haredi Judaism as a denomination that enforces strict conformism among its members. There is a large degree of truth in this, but it should also be remembered that this internal conformism is designed to ensure strong non-conformism with the outside world. Haredi society is indeed in this sense an island of non-conformist anti-modernity within the hegemonic modern culture. In this hegemonic culture, those who are defined as “avant garde” or “rebellious” do not usually truly challenge its values, but rather stretch them to their full extent. Instead, it is the Haredim, with their openly anti-modern stance, who are the truly rebellious “others” who challenge accepted norms. There is no doubt that this is the attraction found in Haredi life by many of those who became religious and joined the Haredi community in the 1970s and 1980s, but it is also often the source of the Haredi community's unpopularity among the general population, despite the latter's proclaimed values of tolerance.

Theological Conservatism: The Ideal of Simple Faith and the Rejection of Theological “Inquiry”

Haredi conservatism is not limited only to practice but also encompasses the realm of faith. This principle states that the perfect believer does not base his belief on metaphysical understandings, certainly not philosophical understandings, and in most cases not even mystical-Kabbalistic understandings, but rather on simple, popular, even somewhat childish faith ([Brown 2017](#)). “The core of faith,” wrote Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810), “is with no wisdom or investigations, but rather in complete simplicity, as the women and the decent people of the multitudes believe” ([Nahman of Bratslav 1983](#), 33).

Simple faith has always been a feature of Judaism, and it was always recognized as a worthy and legitimate form of belief. However, from the end of the Geonic period to the 18th century, it was not considered a religious ideal, but rather as a first step on the way to achieving the ideal. In Jewish philosophy, this ideal was considered to be a form of belief based on rational appreciation of the Divine and of His relation to the world and man; while in Kabbalah and early Hasidism, the ideal presented was one of belief based on an understanding of the secrets of the Torah and sometimes also on mystical experiences. What both these ideals have in common is that they view simple faith as a starting point,

leading to the ultimate goal of intellectual faith, which requires a deep and systematic understanding of metaphysical concepts.

From the end of the 18th century on, and especially during the 19th century, we evidence a rapid and fascinating change in Jewish thought: Kabbalah, which until then was considered the height of Jewish theology, was marginalized, and interest in it dwindled greatly, while Jewish philosophy, which had been largely rejected at the end of the Middle Ages, was now identified mainly with the Enlightenment and with modernist circles. In place of these two, the ideal of simple faith grew to take a central position in Orthodox Judaism. No longer was it seen as the beginning of the journey to belief, but instead as its apogee. Thus “Investigation” in its many forms was considered improper and dangerous.

The background to this change and its characteristics differ according to location and context: in Central European Judaism, the process was mainly linked to the challenge of dealing with the aftermath of Sabbateanism and with the emergence of the Enlightenment; in the Hasidic world, it developed mainly because of Hasidism's transformation into a mass movement, and only afterward due to struggles with the Enlightenment; in the Lithuanian camp, which also faced the threat of enlightenment, other theological alternatives were developed, and only in the second half of the 19th century did it turn to the ideal of simple faith. In the Sephardi Haredi stream, which developed only in the 20th century, this process never fully came to fruition, and here the study and practice of Kabbalah are considered legitimate, and sometimes even prestigious.

The reasons given for the rejection of the great theological systems are several and they are not the same for Kabbalah and Jewish philosophy. “The accursed philosophy,” in the words of Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (1720–1797) (n.d. 179, 246), a phrase that was subject to philological debate,⁵ was considered heresy and banished harshly, while Kabbalah continued to be thought of as the wisdom of deeply hidden and lofty secrets, but one which became seen as inaccessible to mortals such as us due to its great depths and dizzying heights. A range of excuses were given for Maimonides’ studies in philosophy, while the abandonment of Kabbalah, despite the fact that many great sages had engaged in it in the past, was explained, not surprisingly, by the decline of the generations.

In Haredi Judaism, the view that became dominant was that human intellect is weak and limited, and thus susceptible to error, especially where it is subject to temptation of the urges. Modern ideas, based on intellect, reflect the arrogant hubris of modern man. Man cannot know the truth without heavenly revelation and without a strong tradition that passes this revelation down from generation to

generation. For example, according to the *Hafetz Hayim*, we have no need for any further exploration, since the truth has already been handed to us. As his son, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hachohen (Kagan), wrote:

When I was a young man, my father kept me away from books of investigation and philosophy. When he discovered on one occasion that I had bought the *Guide to the Perplexed* he was distressed, took it from me and hid it, and only several years later did I discover it by accident. He said to me once: If someone looks for proof it is a sign that he has doubts, unless he does it in order to demonstrate [the religious truth] to perplexed and misguided people, like the Rambam in his time. And Abraham, who investigated and explored as is explained in the Midrash, is no counter-example; for he was the first, he did not inherit[faith] from his fathers ... But we, the sons of our fathers who received the Torah at Mount Sinai in the presence of thousands of thousands of people and heard the voice of God, why should we waste our time beginning again from ABC?

([Hachohen 1990](#), Part 3, 5)

Beyond the concerns over heresy, the *Hafetz Hayim* also believed that “investigations” ruin the intimate, almost personal relations between the believer and God. In a saying attributed to him, he typically presents this idea in the form of an allegory:

A father holds his son in his arms, kisses him, hugs him, feeds him. If someone were to ask the child, “Who is holding you in his arms?” the child would answer, “My father.” And if the other would say to him (while pointing at another man), “No, *that* is your father,” then the child would point at his father and say, “But *this* is my father!” He does not need proof, he just points with his finger, “This is my father!” In such a case, the child can have true love for his father; but what if the child does not know his father, and we need to prove to him with evidence that this is his father? Then, there can no longer be true love.

([Hachohen 1990](#), Part 3, 116–117)

For similar reasons, most Haredi leaders ruled against engaging in debates with “free thinkers” on issues of faith. This is not a recognition of the weakness of the Haredi worldview, as is sometimes claimed, but rather a recognition of the

weakness of human intellect. The struggle is seen as inherently uneven: the opponent is equipped with persuasive “reason-based” arguments, while the truth is to be found “beyond reason”; moreover, even where the opponent's arguments are weak on a rational basis, they can still be persuasive when wielded by someone with strong rhetorical skills. Alongside these intellectual advantages, the opponent has an even stronger advantage: the power of the baser human inclinations, which lure the listener to adopt a “free” lifestyle and to base it on various justifications (“rationalization of sin,” in the terminology of the Novardok musar school).

“Simple faith” is also at the root of the Haredi response to the Holocaust, which has been a focus of academic research in recent years. One of several examples is an anthology and typological analysis that appeared recently ([Greenberg and Yedidya 2016](#)). In contrast to developments in modern circles, Haredi Judaism did not develop a special “Holocaust theology.” Some Haredi schools of thought prefer a simple explanation of reward and punishment that seeks to clarify “why did the Lord do this unto us?” and link the punishment to sins such as the Enlightenment, secularization, or Zionism. A very different response draws on the concept of simple faith, arguing that no one should seek to examine the “accounts of Heaven,” but instead one should accept with simple faith that “the Lord is perfect in His works, and all His ways are justice.” Philosophical or Kabbalistic explanations are far rarer.

Simple faith also has a price: without an abstract concept of God, those of simple faith often stray into anthropomorphism, sometimes with the use of modifiers such as “as it were,” and sometimes without. In Yiddish slang, the word “as it were” (*kivyochl*) was made into a noun many years ago (*der kivyochl*), used when referring to God in some corporeal fashion. It would seem that overall the Haredi world is willing to pay this price, with a few exceptions such as Habad and certain Lithuanian thinkers who were influenced by Habad during the first half of the 20th century (such as Rabbis Yosef Leib Bloch of Telz or Eliyahu E. Dessler). These are in favor of faith-via-intellect, do not shy away from theological investigations, and afford limited value to the idea of simplicity.

The Rejection of Modernity: The Struggle against Secularization and the New Ideologies

According to this principle, secularism is an illegitimate phenomenon in the

Jewish world, and any ideological movement that has grown out of it is condemnable. The question of the status of the secular Jew in halakhah has been the subject of much consideration by halakhic authorities. On one side Maimonides ruled that those who desecrate the Shabbat in public have the same status as gentiles (Maimonides, *Hilkhhot Shabbat*, 36, 15), and Rabbi Joseph Karo ruled that their wine is forbidden for drinking, like wine used for idolatry (*Shulhan Arukh*, Yoreh De'ah, 2, 5).

Halakhic rulings have also imposed severe sanctions on heretics (*epikorsim*), those who regularly transgress against the commandments (*mumarim*), and especially those who do so not to satisfy their own desires but as a form of rebellion against the Torah (*mumarim lehakhis*). In regard to this latter category, there is even a ruling that one may “lower them [into a pit] and not bring them up,” (Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah, 26a), that is, cause their death without any trial.

On the other side, there is another ruling by Maimonides, according to which:

These sons of the misguided [i.e. Karaites], and their sons, who were cast out by their fathers and were born among the Karaites and raised according to their beliefs—behold, they are like an infant who was taken captive by them and raised by them, and is not agile enough to follow the ways of the commandments; a person of this sort is like one who was forced against his will, and even though he has later learned that he is a Jew, and has seen Jews and their religion, he is still like one who was forced, for he was raised into their erroneous ways ... Therefore, one should bring them to repentance and appeal to them with words of peace until they return to the stronghold of the Torah (Maimonides, *Hilkhhot Mamrim*, 3, 3).

Overall, Haredi halakhic rulings swing between these two poles. Some of the Hungarian rabbis followed the conservative line, and the most prominent of them, the Hasidic Rabbi Hayim Elazar Shapira (1871–1937) of Munkacs, forbade the drinking of wine that had been touched by one who desecrates the Shabbat and forbade marrying such a person ([Shapira 1974](#), Part 1, 74). By contrast, the “captivated infant” doctrine was adopted in the 19th century by one of the great German authorities, Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger (1798–1871) ([1878](#), 23), and was later developed by Rabbi Karelitz ([Karelitz 1994](#), 240, 28).

It should be emphasized that in spite of the harsh struggle against secularity, no Haredi authority has ever ruled that the law of “lowering into a pit” applied to

secular Jews, and Karelitz explained that this law does not apply today in any case whatsoever. He wrote that this law was a product of its time and only to be applied then, as during the Mishnaic and Talmudic eras there was still revealed divine intervention, sins being punished very visibly, and thus those who defied the Torah were particularly brazen, and getting rid of them was a need of the hour; but in our days, when divine intervention is hidden from the world, such a sanction would be seen as unjustified violence, and would amend nothing, “and because our intent is to amend and improve, this law is not applied when it will not amend anything, and instead we must return them [sinners] with bonds of love and bathe them in its light as much as we can” ([Karelitz 1994](#), 240, 16). Indeed, with the exception of the murder of the Reform Rabbi Avraham Cohen (1806–1848) in Galicia in 1848, which was attributed to Haredi zealotry ([Stanislawski 2007](#), 112–118), and even that attribution was seriously questioned ([Manekin 2008](#)), the Haredi struggle against “heretics” has never developed into bloodshed.⁶

If halakhic attitudes toward the individual secular Jew have been, and remain, complex, attitudes toward secularism as an ideology, and indeed toward any branches of secularist ideology, have always been unequivocally harsh. As Rabbi Halberstam clarifies:

The rule is very clear: Any ideology or path whose basis does not accord with our holy Torah, whether the idea was generated by the gentiles or by Jews who resemble them, will not stand for any great length of time, and will collapse after a while. As the sages said in the [Talmudic] tractate of Shabbat: “truth abides, falsehood does not abide,” and any idea that is opposed to our holy Torah, which is the “Torah of truth,” is founded on falsehood and is not sustainable.

([Halberstam 1980](#), 170)

He further explains that the Torah was given to the Jewish people some 4,000 years ago, and has not changed, because it is the “Torah of truth”; it has stood the test of time and proven itself. By contrast, modern ideologies, promising salvation for mankind, are nothing but a series of mass experiments on humanbeings, on the altars of which millions have been sacrificed. As an example, he cites Communist China, where “who knows how many millions of innocents have already been murdered” ([Halberstam 1980](#), 171). Indeed, disillusionment with these regimes does always arrive, though mostly too late.

Only the sages of Israel, who observe the birth of these ideologies, see their evil in time and warn against them. The great sages, including the *Hatam Sofer*, warned against emancipation and against becoming too close with the gentiles, but the masses did not heed their warnings and eventually paid the price: the gentiles themselves were repelled by the assimilation of Jews in their midst, and devised the “final solution” ([Halberstam 1980](#), 171–172).

Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman (1875–1941), one of the most radical of the great Lithuanian Torah sages between the Two World Wars, wrote in a similar vein, though with a much harsher tone, before the Holocaust. He viewed all modern ideologies as modern forms of idolatry and considered the main idolatries of his time to be Nationalism and Socialism. He added that “A miracle has occurred: In heaven, these two idolatries have been combined into one – National-Socialism – and forged into a rod of terrible fury, that strikes at Jews in many lands. The vile impurities that we worshipped are now striking at us.” ([Wasserman 1991](#), 119).

Rabbi Wasserman was murdered in Kovno in June 1941. The book of his collected essays became very influential after it was translated into Hebrew, and later Rabbi Shach expressed similar ideas. Shach did not differentiate between the various modern ideologies, and included democracy as one of them. He identified democratic rule with the values of the Israeli Left, which he saw as an enemy of religion. In November 1993, when he was fighting against the left-wing government led by Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995), he wrote: “We pray to the Almighty: Please free us from this new curse of democracy that has been sent into the world, which is truly like the disease of cancer that was sent into the world, for the holy Torah is the only true democracy” ([Shach 1995](#), 126–127). According to Shach, democracy, which has freedom as one of its ultimate values, is no more than an ideological covering for throwing off of all inhibitions; it “demolishes boundaries” and “destroys mankind” ([Shach 1995](#), 126–127).

Essentially, Haredi opposition to modern ideologies stems from the basic conservatism of Haredi *hashkafah*, deriving from the idea of generational decline. This is an ideology that holds that ancient tradition, which has stood the test of time and survived so many traumas, will always be a better path for humankind than untried political adventures. This idea, which runs through the writings of Rabbis Shach and Halberstam, was given a simple but illustrative formulation by a forgotten Haredi thinker, Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein (1881–1941) of Lomza, a leading figure in the *musar* movement between the Two

World Wars. He wrote that all those who have strived for good based on their own ideas ended up empty-handed, and yet “people whom we well know to be wise and are known to be faithful, intellectuals ... promise us that they have traveled a path that no-one in the world has ever traveled, and that after much struggle and strife and hard work they have found the sought-after good ... How shall we not believe wise and well-known people?!” ([Rosenstein 1958](#), chap. 12, 53).

The desire of the ideologues to lead a “revolution in the spiritual world” was seen by Rosenstein as the product of pride and a desire for honor and as an attempt to acquire prominence and renown, like the great conquerors and leaders ([Rosenstein 1958](#), chap. 4, 48). However, as with physical buildings, then so with spiritual structures: “Mad is this person who will be so arrogant as to destroy and uproot all that previous generations have built” ([Rosenstein 1958](#), chap. 4, 48). If it was always the way of the sages to build on the foundations of their predecessors, laying stone upon stone in the great and glorious palace of tradition, then the approach of modern ideologies “seems to be that all their wisdom and courage lies only in destroying and uprooting the spiritual world, which was constructed over thousands of generations by great figures, elders, and prophets, so as to leave behind them a world that is destroyed and confused” ([Rosenstein 1958](#), chap. 5, 48).

According to Rosenstein, many people are attracted to follow “this madness” not due to their “desire to throw off all restraint, as many have surmised,” but rather because they can find no spiritual peace in their lives. Instead of recognizing that this lack lies in them, and trying to remedy themselves, they believe that this lack lies in the world, and seek to fix it. Thus, “when they hear from some mad, lost fool a new idea, they grasp it with both hands, thinking that perhaps they will find in this idea something useful that will improve their lives and afford them spiritual peace! Poor, miserable people!” ([Rosenstein 1958](#), chap. 7, 49–50).

The Rejection of Modernity: The Struggle against Zionism

According to this principle, Zionism is a threat to true Judaism. While there are various reasons given for this stance, ultimately it would appear that the focus of this opposition is the secularist and modern-ideological nature of the Zionist movement.⁷

The spectrum of oppositional stances to Zionism is very broad. At one end are

the radical Haredi communities, led by the Satmar Hasidim, which refute the right to existence of any form of Jewish sovereignty before Messianic times, and which view the movement to establish a Jewish state as having been responsible for the Holocaust. At the other end are the moderate Haredi factions, which are opposed to the secular nature that typified historical Zionism, but essentially take a positive view of the establishment of the state, consider it to be a “kindness from Heaven,” identify with it, and are engaged in a struggle over its character. And in between is mainstream Haredi Judaism, which in the past was represented politically by Agudat Israel and is now represented by United Torah Judaism. For the most part, this stream has a neutral view of the state per se, seeing it as not entirely negative but devoid of any positive religious value, and believes it should be treated with a detached pragmatism, or, due to its secular character, with pent-up reservation. This stream, too, emphasizes that regardless of one's stance toward the state, the Zionist movement and its ideology were, and remain, a danger to Judaism.

The most eloquent proponent of the view that Zionism is a danger to Judaism was Dr. Isaac Breuer (1883–1946), one of the leaders of Agudat Israel in the first half of the 20th century. While he did not become a major figure in Haredi society and his writings made little impact on it, Breuer has recently gained attention from academic researchers as someone who was able to skillfully and explicitly formulate what others said only haltingly. He defined himself as a “national Jew” ([Breuer 1900](#), 37), and stated that a people consist of a group of individuals united by a national identity base. An identity base is a collection of common components, usually encompassing shared territory, language, folk culture, history, and race ([Breuer 1982a](#), 24). For the last two millennia, however, the Jewish people have not had most of these components, and yet it remains a people. It is therefore an anomaly. Instead of these components, the identity base of the Jewish people consists of its law, the law of the Torah ([Breuer 1900](#), 23–25; [1974](#), 29–37; 1982a, 50–65).

The Jewish people are, then, the people of the Torah, and, Breuer continues, Zionism arrived and attempted to create a new identity base for the Jewish people, predicated on the secular elements described above. But a new identity base means new people. Thus, the tragedy of Zionism is that it transforms the Jewish people into two peoples: one of the Torah, which will remain faithful to its identity, and the “new people” ([Breuer 1982b](#), 103–104).

This approach does not necessarily lead to a negation of the idea of a Jewish state. Indeed, Breuer reached the opposite conclusion: he argued that the Jewish

people needs to establish the “Torah State,” though this view was not accepted by the leadership of Agudat Israel. The implied conclusion is that national identity in its modern form, divorced from religion, is not an option for the Jewish people and that any attempt to forge such an identity must be resisted.

Similar ideas are attributed to Rabbi Hayim of Brisk (1853–1918), whose son quoted him as saying that “The world [the public] mistakenly thinks that the ultimate goal of Zionism is the establishment of a state for the Jews; [but] the ultimate goal of Zionism is the uprooting of the Torah, heaven forbid, and they view the establishment of a state only as the best means for achieving that goal” ([Schoenfeld 1989](#), 62).⁸ If a Jewish homeland were indeed established in the Land of Israel, wrote Rabbi [Wasserman \(1991](#), 101), then “there would certainly be no great joy from this for the Jewish people; for it is well known that more than half the children there study in schools of the Hellenists [i.e. assimilationists]. That is, they are educated from a young age to be people who regularly transgress against the commandments or transgressors who purposefully rebel against the Torah, so what joy is there to be had?” ([Wasserman 1991](#), 101). Rabbi Shach, who as noted was influenced by Wasserman, repeatedly claimed that the Jewish people exist only because of its Torah, defined Zionism as a way of “Israel [being] like all the nations,” and saw secular Israelis as assimilationists in their own land.⁹

Radical Haredi thought also adopted these considerations but was based on a more extremist approach. According to Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1887–1979), the most prominent speaker of this ideology, Zionism is a sin against the “three oaths” that God had the people of Israel swear. In the Song of Songs, the following verse appears three times, with minor differences: “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the fields, that you not awaken or stir up love, until it please” (Song of Songs 2, 7; 3, 5; 8, 4). According to the Babylonian Talmud (Ketubot, 111a), God made Israel swear that they would “not go up [to the Land of Israel] as a wall [*en masse*]” and that they would not “revolt against the nations of the world.” The third vow is for the nations of the world, that they “will not overly enslave Israel.” The Jewish people, then, must accept the burden of exile and not seek to hasten the end.

According to Teitelbaum, Zionism is a transgression of these oaths, in seeking to establish Jewish sovereignty before the coming of the Messiah, and nothing could be a greater effort to hasten the end. Thus, he argues, the Jewish people suffered the punishment cited further on in the same Talmudic text: “Rabbi Elazar said: the Lord said to Israel, ‘If you fulfill the vow, then very well; but if

not, I will abandon your flesh [and you will be prey] like the gazelles and like the hinds of the field’.” Thus, Teitelbaum offers a simple equation: Zionism is the crime, and the Holocaust its punishment ([Teitelbaum 1961](#), 5). It is clear, then, that the character of the state or of the movement that brought about its establishment is not the issue: any Jewish sovereignty, of whatever kind, that precedes Messianic redemption is fundamentally unacceptable.

Religious Zionism is not seen as much better than secular Zionism. During a visit to the Land of Israel in 1921, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter (1865–1948), leader of Gur Hasidic court, while calling for peace between all the Orthodox camps, praised Rabbi Kook, and criticized the extremists, saying “such a path is inconceivable” ([Alter 1935](#), 29), but he himself subsequently opposed the unification agreement between Agudat Israel and the Mizrachi movement which was signed in Paris in 1938 ([Brown 2011](#), 235). Rabbi [Wasserman \(1991](#), 127) coined a phrase that echoed down the following generations: “If the nationalist idea is a form of idolatry, then the national-religious idea is a form of dual worship [of God and idol].” Using a different association, Rabbi Shach told his students in 1977 “that these national religious Jews are in the same pot [as the secular Zionists], and it is entirely *treif* [not kosher], even if it is covered over by their crocheted skullcaps” ([Shach 1988](#), Vol. 1, 75).

The ideological bases for Haredi opposition to Zionism, then, may be very different, and consequently also the depth and strength of such opposition. However, disapproval of Zionism at some level is common to all Haredi factions. Even those who are very much involved in affairs of the state and care deeply for its welfare, such as Habad Hasidim and members of Shas, are careful not to be identified as “Zionists.” For Haredim, the label “Zionism” is tainted, and as such the label is more important than the content. However, it should be noted that this sensitivity has somewhat faded in recent years.

Self-Seclusion: Political Isolationism and Cultural Fortification

This principle states that the preservation of Haredi Judaism can be attained only by erecting closed walls between it and the surrounding secularized world. There is broad agreement on this principle, though various shades have emerged within Haredi Judaism regarding the form those walls should take and the degree of their permeability.

As we saw above, the question of how to relate to “those who throw off the

yoke” [of Halakhah] has been a major issue since the dawn of the crisis of modernity. Beyond the question of the status of the individual, which was mainly discussed in halakhic literature, there was also the larger, public question. In Central Europe, from the 1870s onward, there developed the doctrine of “the separation of the communities,” according to which Orthodox Jews are required to secede from the general Jewish community and create their own communities. These were to be autonomous political bodies, recognized by the authorities, thus allowing them to charge membership fees and to run their own religious affairs independently. Hungarian law recognized this right in 1871, and German law in 1876, and Orthodox Jewish leaders in both these countries called on their followers to exercise this right ([Katz, 1998](#)). However, while this movement was successful in Hungary and most Orthodox Jews seceded from the larger Jewish collective, only a few Orthodox communities did the same in Germany.

Rabbi Sofer, in whose time this remained a theoretical question, wrote that separation is the correct sanction for sinners and effective defense for those faithful to the tradition, and even called for a more radical step: “If their fate was ours to decide,” he wrote in 1813, “my opinion would be to drive them out of our borders; not to allow their children to marry ours, so that they not draw them after them; and let their community be like that of Zadok and Baithos [Second Temple sects], of the Karaites – they to themselves, and we to ourselves.” However, he did limit this by saying that it would be dependent on the consent of the kingdom [the state] ([Sofer 1973](#), 89). In his will, written in 1837, he used a verse from Psalms to warn his family to stay away from those who do not keep the commandments: “Incline not your heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity. the new ones who have distanced themselves from the Lord and his Torah with their many sins; do not live in their vicinity and do not join with them at all” ([Sofer 1964](#), 119).

His disciple, Rabbi Moses Schick (1807–1879), who was already at the eye of the storm over the separation of the communities, even hinted that the sinners themselves would, in the end, be benefited by it. Separation would allow the preservation of “the truth” in its purest form, and “in the end, truth shall spring out of the earth and all the evildoers shall know who held the truth, and that the intention of the rabbis in agreeing to separation was for the good of the evildoers, who will turn back from their ways and also follow the truth, which is the Torah, the eternal truth” ([Schick 1985](#), 5, 17).

“Separate thou from me” (Genesis 13, 9) said Abraham to Lot, after their flocks had grown too large to be together; but Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

(1808–1888), the leading spiritual figure of German Neo-Orthodoxy, and one of the leaders of the idea of separation, attributed more principled motives to Abraham's plea: “Here, I am restricted ... I must be alone; but you have withdrawn from my worldview ... Go thee to the right or the left, and I will stay here in my solitude” ([Hirsch 1989](#)).

The idea of separation was raised repeatedly in Eastern Europe as well, but there it was firmly rejected by most spiritual leaders, both Lithuanian Torah sages and Hasidic rabbes ([Brown 2010](#)). Most prominent in his well-argued opposition was Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (1816–1893), head of the Volozhin yeshiva. In contrast to Sofer, who saw the separation between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as a precedent worth emulating, the Netziv saw it as a warning sign:

This idea [separation of communities] is like taking a sword to the body of the nation and its existence. When we were in the Holy Land, with the Second Temple, the land and the temple were destroyed and Israel exiled because of the division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and because of the great causeless hatred that abounded ... Thus even more so, now we are in exile and Israel is scattered among the nations of the world, and in exile we are as the dust of the earth ... the best thing for a lump of dust in a stream of water is to be made into solid stone; then even if a river washes over it, it will just roll from place to place, but will not be lost entirely. Thus, the best thing for Israel among the nations is to be the Stone of Israel, consolidated together into a single association, and then no people or nation will be able to destroy them. So, how shall we call for people to separate from their fellows, so that the nations of the world will come and wash them away one by one, Heaven forbid?!

([Berlin 1993](#), 1, 44)

Both opposing approaches thus received a stamp of approval from Torah sages, and thus both were seen as legitimate and worthy. The principle of “faith in the sages” requires that both be followed, each for its place.

The debate over the proper response also reached the pre-state Land of Israel, particularly when the British sought to organize the Jewish Yishuv under a single political umbrella called Knesset Israel, headed by a civil branch, the National Council, and a religious branch, the Chief Rabbinate. It was clear that the Zionists would control these bodies. The extremist Haredi factions in the Old

Yishuv of Jerusalem, many of whose leaders were of Hungarian descent, sought to adopt the Hungarian approach to the local arena and to gain recognition of their community as a separate community, whose members consisted of those who “exited” Knesset Israel. After much discussion, the British authorities recognized the right for communities to disassociate themselves from Knesset Israel, leading to the formal establishment of the isolationist Orthodox community, which called itself “the Orthodox Community of Jerusalem” (*Edah Haharedit*) ([Friedman 1987](#), 125–145; [Keren-Kratz 2016](#)). This community, which was an umbrella organization for all the extremist factions in the Holy City, proudly carried the banner of “isolationism” (*Hitbadlut*). At that time, Agudat Israel supported this approach, not without difficulties ([Friedman 1977](#), 219–226).

However, several years later came the waves of immigration from Eastern Europe, which included Haredi Jews. These mainly settled in the New Yishuv, seeking to work for a living rather than rely on charity, and some even turned their hand to “pioneering” agriculture. The demand to “exit” from Knesset Israel meant an economic and social sacrifice without offering them anything that seemed of real religious value, for in their own homelands there had been no tradition of “isolationism.” Therefore, many of these Jews, including community rabbis, refrained from leaving Knesset Israel. For as long as this phenomenon existed in the wider public, the heads of Agudat Israel turned a blind eye to it. But when rabbis, who received their wages from the Jewish National Council (*Hava’ad Haleumi*) and from the Chief Rabbinate, also followed the same line, Agudat Israel’s leadership was faced with a quandary, unsure of whether to denounce these nonconformists or to forgive them. The question was brought before the great Torah sages and aroused a fierce debate in 1935.

In the end, the moderate camp won out. Rabbi Karelitz, who had arrived in Palestine two years earlier, and was still largely unknown at the time, gave his reasoning most forcefully. The true battle, he explained to the Lithuanian great sages, was not at the countrywide level but at the local level, and it did not concern political frameworks but rather cultural and educational infrastructure ([Brown 2011](#), 206–216). The protests of the Jerusalem zealots against the moderate rabbis did no damage to the Zionist establishment, but rather served to undermine the efforts of Haredim to build themselves this infrastructure:

Here there is no difference from the cities of Poland; while they have organizations and heads of organizations, the greater enemy is the local

destroyers in every city, who seek to oppose the appointment of a decent rabbi, a Torah school, and the other requirements of the Torah. And here [on the local level] there is no National Council or Knesset [i.e. *Knesset Israel*], but it is all one thing: in every location we come across local destroyers, but no state power. And the main [defense] tactic is the appointment of rabbis in every city, arrangements for ritual slaughter, building ritual baths, building synagogues, and above them all, Torah schools for young children [*heder*]. But the central axis for all these changes is a decent rabbi.

([Karelitz 2011](#)–2017, II, 76)

Instead of the Hungarian approach of political isolationism, Karelitz proposed an approach of cultural “fortification organized around yeshivot and religious institutions, which he termed “fortresses of the Torah” ([Karelitz 1990](#), 65). When he became one of the “great sages” of Haredi Judaism in Israel, particularly after the Holocaust, he continued this approach. He expressed indifference to most of the political-institutional questions of the time and was not concerned when Agudat Israel took up a role within the institutions of the young Zionist state, but he would pounce fiercely whenever he felt that the secular regime was using its power to harm religious life and halakhic observance. “Our hands are busy with building walls,” he wrote during his last great struggle, against the conscription of young women into national civil service ([Karelitz 1990](#), 87–88).

Ultimately, both approaches survived: political isolationism remains the chosen stance of the radical factions, while cultural fortification has been adopted by the Haredi mainstream. From a historical perspective, it seems that the walls built by cultural fortification were no less strong or effective than those built by the Hungarian approach. In our times, it would appear, these walls have cracked slightly, but they are far from collapsing. Be it as it may, both approaches are an expression of the fundamental Haredi desire to build walls that will prevent, as much as possible, any undue influence from the “destroyers.”

“We Have Nothing Left but This Torah”: Education and Yeshivot

This principle states that the main guarantee for the continued survival of the Jewish people is the Torah, particularly Torah study. In practical terms, it requires that the lion's share of social resources are invested in maintaining the

“Torah-World,” namely, the “world” of yeshivas and *Kollel*. The latter is required to be based on a “puerely holy” curriculum, i.e. focus solely on religious studies in Israel, or additional minimal general studies in other countries. Haredi education repeatedly demands “the dedication of one's life for the Torah.”

Torah study was recognized as a central value in Talmudic times (Jerusalem Talmud, *Peah*, 1a), but it has not always enjoyed the same status as today. In fact, this issue was part of the disagreement between the Hasidim, who most highly valued the religious experience and serving God in “love and fear,” and the Lithuanian, who placed Torah study at the head of their value system. The renewed victory of the value of Torah study should thus be seen as a victory for the Lithuanians ([Kehat 2016](#), 589–591).

Indeed, both the Hasidic yeshivot that began to emerge at the end of the 19th century ([Stampfer 1999](#)) and the Sephardi yeshivot that were established in Israel in the 20th century ([Leon 2013](#); [Miles 2019](#)), viewed the Lithuanian yeshivot as a model for emulation, or at least for inspiration. The stronger the secular movements grew, and as the numbers of those leaving the Haredi community increased, the more the Torah institutions became seen as the life raft of faithful Judaism. The crisis of modernity made the words of the prayer *Remember the Covenant*, which is recited on the eve of the New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) and at the close of prayers on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kipur*), especially poignant:

The Holy City and its regions
Were turned into ruins and humiliation
And all its treasures are sunken and lost
And there is nothing left but this Torah

The words “[we have] nothing left but this Torah” thus became a sort of motto for the fortification of the Torah-World. They became especially deeply ingrained after the Holocaust, when the Torah centers of Europe were destroyed. At that juncture, the Haredim had to apply all their strength to the establishment of new Torah foundations in the new great centers that developed after the war, Israel and the United States.

In Israel, this principle took a unique form, and became a part of the general cultural fortification efforts in form of the “society of learners” ([Friedman 1991a](#), 70–88), in which every man continued his studies even after marriage, in

a *kollel*. The small stipend from the *kollel*, most of it provided by the state and a small proportion from donations, was not sufficient to support a large Haredi family, even living meagerly. Thus, Haredi women had to take on the burden of being the wage earner in addition to running the household ([Brown \[Hoizman\] 2012](#); [Caplan 2007](#)), while parents were expected to help the young family making do with little.

At its inception, the society of learners was perceived as a form of “emergency decree,” a total mobilization during crisis in order to rebuild the ruins. Nevertheless, after the Torah world was reinstated, flourished, and reached an unprecedented scale, the Haredi leadership in Israel continued to preach for its continuation. Most prominently, Rabbi Shach emphasized that Jewish existence is predicated solely on the Torah. The state, the military, and territories—all these are founded on power, and power is transient. It is quite possible that we will find ourselves in exile once more, and we will again discover that the Torah is the cornerstone of our existence ([Brown 2003](#), 298–299).

Finally, it should be noted that this idea is not part of the Haredi *hashkafah* in the United States or other Haredi centers, but rather unique to the State of Israel; while it has weakened considerably in recent years, and the trend of Haredim entering employment has grown significantly, these changes are still largely viewed as necessary compromises, while the ideal remains that of full-time Torah study.

Essentialism: Human Nature, Israel as the Chosen People, and Men and Women

This is not exactly a principle, but more of an ideational tendency. Haredim tend to see the world as consisting of fixed essences, unchanging types of things. In the modern distinction between “nature” and “culture,” Haredi *hashkafah* clearly places greatest weight on the “nature” side of things, the latter obviously bearing the meaning of nature-qua-God's-creation. Obviously, this approach is a direct outcome of the conservatism of Haredi beliefs. Indeed, Haredim are not likely to be keen adherents of the “critical theories” that have been and remain fashionable in the West, particularly since the Second World War. While these theories find social and cultural constructs everywhere and claim that these constructs shape the “oppressive” social order, Haredim find natural order everywhere and view attempts to alter it as hopeless and even dangerous.

First and foremost, this approach relates to differences between people. For

example, Haredi thinkers greatly emphasize the deep essential difference between Jews and all other human beings and nations of the world. They may, for example, refer to the lowliness of the gentiles and their deep-seated hatred of Jews. At the same time, this phenomenon has a more countenancing dimension among Haredim: prominent in Hasidic thought since the 19th century has been the idea of the “Jewish Spark” (*pintele yid*), according to which every Jew contains a divine spark that is never lost. Even if this spark is hidden beneath a thick covering, due to the individual having sinned greatly, it will still continue to burn within ([Piekarz 1990](#), 150–152, who interprets this idea, too, as expressing an anti-secular sentiment).

As mentioned above, this idea also has halakhic aspects, but first and foremost it shapes the Haredi consciousness of basic solidarity with the Jewish people, even when most Jews have abandoned the path of Torah and the commandments. This solidarity has its limits, and there is no doubt that a Haredi Jew will feel a much deeper sense of shared destiny with other Haredim than with secular Jews, but it does serve as a long-term guarantee that Haredim will not act to create a total divide within the Jewish people.

A similar essentialist tendency can be seen among Haredim regarding the differences between men and women. Haredim completely reject the “feminist revolution,” some of whose proponents sought to present the differences between men and women as being due to culture rather than nature; instead, they hold on strongly to the idea that there are very basic male and female attributes that cannot be changed (for example, [Schneerson 2017](#)). This idea also serves to justify the Haredi halakhic conservatism regarding the status of women. The basic halakhic approach is that for women, “the king's daughter is all glorious within” (Psalms 45, 13), and while there may have been some far-reaching changes following the entry of Haredi women to the workforce, these are strictly limited to what is demanded by unavoidable necessity ([Brown \[Hoizman\] 2012](#)). In Haredi thought, women are seen as delicate, modesty-abiding, vulnerable, dependent, and wiser in matters of the material world, but lacking the abstract conceptual understanding required for theoretical Torah study ([Brown \[Hoizman\] 1997](#); [Guttel 2013](#); [El-Or 1994](#)).

Certainly, there has been a growth in women studying Torah in the Haredi world, but the biggest change in this respect occurred during the 1910s, when the *Beit Yaakov* network was founded and was granted permission to teach Torah to girls, and since then there have been only small developments. In the Hasidic world, there is also a clear tendency to sideline women from most matters of

Hasidic worship, which center on the leader (*rebbe*) and the prayer house (*shtiebel*).

It is noteworthy that Haredi women have attained managerial positions, mainly in education, and it seems as though this has not caused any real problems. However, the idea of Haredi women being conscripted into the IDF or even to national civic service was viewed as a “decree of forceful conversion,” in which one should be killed rather than accede to ([Cohen et al. 1974](#), 21); and when the idea of including women in Haredi political parties was recently raised by a group of Haredi women, it was rejected with some ridicule by the Haredi leadership ([Eglish 2017](#)).

It is possible that the Haredi essentialist approach is also what made racism toward Sephardi Jews more common and acceptable in the Haredi Ashkenazi community than in other parts of Israeli society, and it would appear that even the prominent rabbinical figures who spoke out strongly against such racism allowed it to thrive in their own yeshivot. However, this racist attitude was never seen as properly justified in principle and was never anchored in formal Haredi *hashkafah*.

Above and beyond its essentialism regarding different types of people, Haredi *hashkafah* is also imprinted with an essentialist approach to “human nature” in general. In this case, it seems that the influence of the Lithuanian *musar* movement, which is fundamentally pessimistic, has overcome that of early Hasidism, which was optimistic in character. Even among those thinkers who talk of the “greatness of man,” a concept commonly linked to the uniquely optimistic *musar* theology of the Slobodka yeshiva ([Brown 2007](#); [Tikochinsky 2016](#)), and certainly among those whose approach towards human nature is less crediting, it is made very clear that the evil inclination is an extremely powerful force, which not only attracts people toward sin but also confuses them and presents a range of reasonings to justify it. People's personal desires and interests blur their thinking, making them weak creatures who can easily take a wrong turn on the byways of life and fall foul of the dangerous challenges they pose. This lack of faith in human nature leads inexorably to the conclusion that in order not to fail, people should rely not on their own thinking but on the Torah and on the guidance of the great sages of the generation, or, in the case of Hasidim, of their leaders.

Rigorous Application of the Law: Stringency and the “Ethics of Submission”

According to this principle, the commandments should be observed to the utmost level of strictness, using leniencies and allowances as little as possible, even when these are based on accepted halakhic rulings ([Friedman 1991a](#), 80–87; [1993](#)).

One can doubt whether this characteristic approach should be seen as a principle of Haredi *hashkafah*, as a thorough examination reveals a surprising fact: the three most influential halakhic authorities of the second half of the 20th century, Rabbis Auerbach, Feinstein, and Yosef, can all be considered lenient in their rulings, and the last two can be described as being consciously so ([Gordin 2017](#); [Lau 2005](#); [Mashiach 2013](#); [Picard 2007](#)). While they did welcome stringencies, they did not consider this a mainstream option for the wider public. However, it seems that there has been something of a grassroots drive in this direction within Haredi society, among other reasons because many of its members are Torah students (*Bnei Torah*), who see themselves as obligated to follow more demanding standards.

Menachem Friedman correctly suggested that the preference for strictness was closely connected to Haredi society's character as a “society of learners” ([Friedman 1991a](#), 83–85). Indeed, while a similar trend exists in American Haredi society it would, overall, seem to be more moderate than in Israel.

This inclination toward stringency is thus linked to the realities that developed in the new Haredi centers around the world after the Holocaust, but as a religious ideal, it dates back to much earlier periods and figures. In the Talmudic period, we find the application of stringency as an accepted way of avoiding doubt, at least regarding biblical commandments (as opposed to rabbinic ones), and also as a way of protecting “weaker” commandments that may be neglected or under threat. However, Talmudic literature does not offer the figure of stringent person as a religious ideal, with the seeming exception of the “early Hasidim,” who were considered an elitist and separatist group.

Such ideals developed over the centuries, and it seems as though in the modern era and the growth of Orthodoxy, an interesting range of rabbinic and spiritual stringent “figures” emerged. Examples include Rabbi Sofer who expanding on the Talmudic approach, followed a policy of stringency in all issues he saw as being under attack from Reform Judaism; Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira of Dinov (1783–1841), a Hasidic rabbi from the early 19th century, who spoke of stringency rooted in religious passion of love of the Lord and a desire to elevate sanctity over and above the measure defined in halakhah; Rabbi Yosef

Yozel Horowitz (1850–1919) of Novardok who believed that humans are driven to be lenient in situations of doubt, and thus the scales should be tipped toward stringency in such cases so as to achieve a balance that comes close to the truth; Rabbi Yitzhak Ze'ev (Velvel) Soloveitchik (1886–1959), one of the great Lithuanian scholars and a rigid and severe man, who was known for his extremely stringent approach, but claimed that he was only following halakhah; and his contemporary, aforementioned Rabbi Karelitz, who spoke in terms of “rigorous application of the law,” projected an “ethos of stringency,” and tended toward stringency in cases of doubt, seemingly due to his halakhic view which recognized that legal boundaries can often be fuzzy ([Brown 2011](#)).

The range of theological explanations for stringency reveals that this is an ideal that stems from several sources, which eventually coalesced into a single social trend. It finds expression in various aspects of religious life, particularly in the laws of the Sabbath, menstrual purity, modesty, and dietary law (*kashrut*). For example, a halakhic ruling such as that of Rabbi Hayim Halberstam (1797–1876) of Sanz, who, in the 19th century, permitted to drink coffee that was stirred with chicory suspected of having been used in pig fat ([Brown \[Hoizman\] \(2003, Section 13, 2.1\)](#)), would be unthinkable today.

Furthermore, some of the main lenient rulings of the halakhic authorities mentioned above were not adopted by the Haredi world that venerates them, but rather by modern Orthodox or religious Zionists. The rulings of Rabbi Feinstein permitting the use of non-Jewish milk produced in supervised factories ([Feinstein 1959–1985, Yoreh De'ah, 1, 47–48](#)) and allowing lowering the dividing device between men and women in synagogue to a height of five feet (around 1.5 meters) ([Feinstein 1959–1985, Orach Hayim, 1, 42](#)) are good examples of this. Rabbi Auerbach thought that the use of electrical appliances that did not produce light, heat, or noise was permitted on the Sabbath, but explicitly considered himself to be overruled by the more stringent ruling of Rabbi Karelitz who forbade using any electrical appliances ([Mashiach 2013, 187](#)). Apparently, he even thought that turning off electricity on Shabbat should be allowed but refrained from publishing this opinion. Rabbi Yosef permitted wedding seating without gender separation, but his followers denied this ruling and tried to present his opinion as unanimous with the stringent Haredi line ([Ben Haim 2018, 183–184](#)). Indeed, there are rulings that make it unacceptably easy.

Conclusion and Afterword

In this chapter, I suggest ten principles of Haredi ideology, the “ten commandments,” as one Haredi reader of this article called them. These include:

1. Faith in the sages
2. Decline of the generations
3. Halakhic conservatism
4. Theological conservatism
5. Rejection of religious reform
6. Rejection of Zionism, and non-alignment with the state of Israel
7. Withdrawal and separation
8. Torah study as a supreme value
9. Essentialism
10. Inclination toward stringency

These principles are not sufficient to provide a full account of the “Haredi mind,” nor even of Haredi *hashkafah*. They are merely principles, presented here somewhat crudely, and in truth far more complex. However, I submit that they provide a basic portrait of the ideational framework that underpins Haredi culture.

In contrast with its self-image, Haredi *hashkafah* is not static. It has undergone many changes and continues to change even today. Some of these changes stem from Haredi society's responses to the outside world, while others are a result of internal dynamics.

First, while there is even greater engagement today with questions of ideology than ever before, the term *hashkafah* is less commonly used, particularly among the younger generation, and *hashkafah* itself has become less prestigious. It seems as though this decline began under the leadership of Rabbi Elyashiv, who was a fastidious halakhic decisor for whom questions of *hashkafah* held little interest, and then continued after his death when the Lithuanian leadership split for the first time in its history into two camps, the mainstream versus the Jerusalem faction. Within these groups, there are opposing forces. Because the Lithuanian community has always been the main force behind the development of *hashkafah*, this new reality made it difficult for it to present a widely accepted Haredi worldview. It has also led to a certain erosion of the principle of “faith in the sages.” However, it remains the case that the majority of Haredim abide by the principles described here, to various degrees of commitment and varying extremes.

Notwithstanding less prominence in forming *hashkafah*, The Hasidic and Sephardi streams have also undergone interesting developments. For example, there have been certain changes regarding “faith in the sages,” from the weakening of some of the Hasidic courts to the unprecedented growth in strength of others, particularly the Vizhnitz-Merkaz court, in which the character worship of the leader is reaching hypertrophic proportions. Since the passing of Rabbi Yosef, the Sephardi Haredi community has been more willing to express pride in his having been a lenient decisor, representing a deviation from the principle of stringency.

Additionally, the status of Haredi women is in continuing flux across all Haredi sectors, and there is no doubt that this is gradually leading to changes in perceptions of women and will undercut Haredi essentialism to some degree. Meanwhile, attitudes to Zionism, as a historical phenomenon, remain largely negative, and in extremist circles even highly hostile, but this is a historical and largely theoretical issue. When it comes to the question of attitudes toward the State of Israel today, Haredim express far more solidarity and support than in the past and hold hawkish right-wing political views – thus embracing a de-facto nationalist ideology – significantly more than several decades ago.

Only a small group within the Haredi public fundamentally challenges the contents of accepted Haredi *hashkafah*. These are the “New Haredim,” otherwise referred to as “Modern Haredim.” In most cases, their fairly open approach to modernity is expressed in terms of lifestyle, employment, leisure, and more; but there are some who have a strong intellectual orientation and seek to actively expand the horizons of the younger Haredi generation and become more open to academic education and to other non-Haredi intellectual influences. These New Haredim aim to formulate their own Haredi outlook in systematic, theological, and even philosophical terms, but they also seek to delineate more flexible boundaries of Haredism, which reflect their system of values and the interests they want to promote. In this undertaking, some of them rely on old-new *hashkafah* sources, such as the teachings of Rabbi Samson, or even on Western conservative theories, such as those of Edmund Burke (1729–1797) which they often access through the mediation of current American neo-conservatives, and multicultural theories that offer justification for their separated existence based on premises that are alien to them. Haredim of this kind will have difficulties subscribing to the principles presented here but will presumably admit that they are exceptional in this, compared with most of their fellow Haredim.

In addition to the changes and diversification in Haredi *hashkafah*, we will do

well to remember that Haredi society is not constructed solely on principles and that it repeatedly makes pragmatic compromises, both at the grassroots and among the elites. The opponents of Haredi society enjoy pointing to these compromises as a sign of inconsistency or manipulateness, all the more contemptible from those who profess to be totally faithful to their values. But compromises are made by every society; they are an unavoidable feature of reality, and perhaps even a condition for continued survival, especially for a minority group. The question is whether these compromises are viewed as forced adjustments or as substantial changes in substance. Due to the inherent conservatism of Haredi society, it tends to present any changes as one-off deviations caused by unavoidable circumstances; but eventually, quantitative change becomes substantial change, and recurrent “deviation,” albeit permitted, becomes a norm. The unwillingness to recognize these changes is sometimes seen as hypocritical, particularly by more critical Haredim, and often results in a degree of cynicism toward the system as a whole.

However, despite all the changes, gradations, and deviations in *hashkafah*, Haredi Judaism still rests on very solid ideational foundations. A sober examination of past changes relating to Haredi beliefs and values will show that, despite everything, there is much greater continuity than change when it comes to the Haredi worldview.

This article does not provide an exhaustive and thorough account of Haredi *hashkafah*, but rather offers an overview and certain observations, largely in order to show that this society, which is often viewed through the lens of social processes and current events, also engages in a dynamic internal discourse surrounding ideas and values; and that the knowledge of that discourse does not only help us understand this minority group in Israeli society but also see how it poses fascinating challenges to modern and post-modern thought. Some Haredi principles may have parallels in other intellectual systems of religious movements and conservative philosophies, particularly those from the period following the French Revolution; but it seems as though the overall Haredi blend was and remains unique.

Some of the ideas that emerged in these other ideological and cultural worlds found their way into the Haredi world. This is a natural and almost inevitable development in any movement that interacts with the surrounding world. However, even if Haredim are subject to outside influences and undergo certain changes, they still refuse to follow many of the ideas and trends that characterize the Western intellectual arena today and reach into all echelons of public life. I

believe that Haredim's non-conformism to the outside society, in sharp contrast with the conformism it demands within, should evoke a basic respect towards them, but furthermore, should be perceived as a benefit for every society that wants to avoid sinking into one-dimensional thinking. Opening a window to Haredi worldviews, even without adopting its principles, reveal some internal logic even in the world of those who shun themselves from the “self-evident” truisms of the hegemonic culture.

Notes

1. [This chapter appeared in a brief and popular form in *Eretz Aheret* \(Brown 2007\).](#)
2. [I do not believe that this term appeared in Orthodox Jewish Hebrew texts in the early 19th century. During the first half of the 20th century, it appears in a few texts from Agudat Israel circles, and it can be surmised that it made its way there from German Jewish Neo-Orthodoxy. It was widely used by Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach, leader of the Lithuanian-Mitnagdic camp in Israel from the 1970s to the mid-1990s.](#)
3. [On this concept see: Bacon 1996, 48–69; Brown 2005, 537–600, 2013, 2014, 255–289; Kaplan, 1992, 1–60; Katz 1997, 41–50.](#) This discussion is largely based on these studies.
4. [See: Elon \(1988, 236–238\); Ta Shma \(1979–1980\); Raffeld \(1992, 119–140\); Raffeld \(1995, 113–130\); Wozner \(1997\); Stampfer \(2001–2004\).](#)
5. [See Fuenn 1860, 152; Levine 1989, 43–46; Malzan 1873, 31; Marcus 1954, 79; Shochat 2002.](#)
6. [Indeed, the opposite has been the case. Haredim, and especially the extremists among them, have repeatedly claimed that it is they who have suffered from Zionist violence, which has even claimed lives. For example, they cite the murder of Yaakov Israel de Haan in 1924 \(Meshi Zahav and Meshi Zahav 1986\).](#)
7. [This chapter is based mainly on Friedman 1991b, 24–68; Don-Yehia 1984, 55–93; Ravitzky 1996; Stern, Brown, Neuman, Katz, and Kedar 2015, 79–270.](#)
8. [See in addition Landa and Rabinovich 1900, 55.](#)
9. [Note: Shach \(1988, 4–6; 1990, 118, 132 \[attributing this outlook to the Enlightenment\]; 1993, 22,32,38, 41, 47, 92; 1995, 121–122 \[ascribing this outlook to the Rabin government\]\); Brown 2003, 297.](#)

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2 The Haredim in Israeli Politics

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Introduction

Israel's Ultra-Orthodox (in Hebrew Haredi [sg.] or Haredim [pl.]) represents a unique phenomenon in the Western political world. No other Western state has a relatively large population that aspires to establish a theocratic regime or, in Mittleman's words, “a renewed ... polity under the rule of God” (1996, xi), where a regime based on sacred texts, in this case, the Torah (Holy Scriptures) and its commandments would serve as the state's constitution ([Mittleman 1996](#), 1), and where legislation and practical policy would be based on religion and divinity ([Mittleman 1996](#), 4).

The population group that perhaps comes closest to the Haredim in this respect are the Amish in the United States, but the latter are demographically marginal and have no political ambitions to shape the character of the state. The Tea Party, another American Christian group, seeks more Christianity-based legislation, but does not aspire to change the United States political system in its entirety. Among Europe's Christian-Democratic parties, such as the Christian-Democrats in Germany, the religious element is tenuous and vague. In fact, they barely qualify as genuinely religious parties. Nor does the West have a population group whose way of life, values, and viewpoints differ as greatly from those of the rest of the population. Not surprisingly, Europe's early Haredi communities came to be known as “outside communities” (*Austrittsgemeinden*), having declared their intention of disengaging from the majority Jewish

community ([Mittleman 1996](#), 112).

The Haredim are different from the orthodox religious Zionists in many respects. They differ socially – in their dress, residential areas, religious conduct, and rejection of “intermarriage” – and particularly in their relations with the state. Religious Zionists have an overall positive approach towards the state, even if they resist its so-called secular character. While Religious Zionism views the state as “the beginning of redemption” (*athaltah degeulah*), for the Haredim it is essentially an extension of the Diaspora, or exile, albeit in the Land of Israel. As far as they are concerned, it is forbidden to seek the preservation of the Jewish people through the state, for such matters are exclusively within the domain of the Torah. In the words of Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1899–2001), leader of the Haredi Lithuanian camp in the last three decades of the 20th century, “it is not on the legacy of land that the People's existence depends, but rather on the power of the Torah” ([Brown 2015](#), 192, 207, 212).

The Haredim fall into several main divisions, which also have political significance. These include Hasidim, Lithuanians, also known as “opponents” (*Mitnagdim*), those who historically opposed Hasidism, and those of Oriental origin, referred to as *Sephardim* or *Mizrachim*. Whereas the origins of the first two divisions lay in Europe, the latter is based upon those who immigrated to Israel from Islamic countries. But there are other divisions as well, including extreme anti-Zionist groups, such as Satmar Hasidim and “The Guardians of the City” (*Neturei Karta*) that overall unite under the organizational umbrella of the “Haredi Community” (*Edah Haharedit*), as well as Habad and Breslav Hasidim who operate many times separately. The important political division, which does not necessarily correlate with these mentioned, is between moderate, radical, and centrist Haredim.

Moderate Haredim aligned in the past primarily with “The Workers of Agudat Israel” (*Poalei Agudat Israel*), a quasi-socialist wing of the Haredim, and since the 1980s with Shas, view the founding of the state as a positive event with a messianic theological stand, defining it as “the beginning of redemption” of sorts ([Brown 2015](#), 100). They do not as a rule reject the symbols of the state, but neither do they accept the ideological principles of Zionism. Brown defined them as “Zionists without Zionism” ([Brown 2015](#), 100). Their “compromise from the outset” with the State is ideologically justifiable, and not merely based on interests ([Brown 2015](#), 161). As such, they have not had, and still do not have, any objection to joining government coalitions, serving as ministers, participating in the Cabinet, or taking part in decision-making on matters of

security and foreign affairs.

Radical Haredim are a small but very vocal and visible minority, conspicuous at demonstrations and occasionally violent. They are primarily identified with the Edah Haharedit, hold a staunch separatist approach that advocates boycotting the state's institutions and not participating in elections. Their view of the very existence of the State is illegitimate, and their attitude toward it is extremely negative.

Centrist Haredim, who align primarily with the parties Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah, are indeed in the “center.” On the one hand, they believe in “social fortification” and contend that the existence of the People of Israel depends not on the state but on its faith in the Torah. They do not view the state as something positive or as a matter of principle. Thus, they do not celebrate Independence Day, which they view as “a gentile holiday full of idolatry and Jewish bloodshed” ([Ben-Haim 2004](#), 75). Shahr Ilan claims that within these circles exist feelings of “unbridled scorn and cynicism towards state institutions,” as reflected in non-payment of taxes, voter fraud, and embezzlement of state funds. An example for the latter is registering fictitious students at state-funded yeshivas ([Ilan 2000](#), 18).

However, they believe in operating within the state structure, joining state institutions, such as the Parliament (*Knesset*) and government coalitions, and participating as government ministers on occasion, in the early days of statehood and again more recently. Their aims are overall pragmatic: Rehabilitation of the post-Holocaust yeshiva network, state support for institutions of religious study, recognition of their “independent” educational system, and exemption from military service. Their attitude toward the State is a “compromise after the fact” ([Brown 2015](#), 161), a non-ideological compromise that results from lack of alternatives and is therefore forgivable. Rabbi Shach termed the state as “footprints of the messiah” (*ikveta demeshiha*), namely the final stage before redemption, but in a negative connotation ([Brown 2015](#), 212).

The Attitudes towards Democracy

The vast majority of Haredim do not view democracy as a matter of principle or ideology. It is at best a tool to achieve their aims, not a worthwhile objective in itself, and is often termed a “new fashion,” something “non-kosher” (*treif*). Rabbi Shach compared democracy to a “terrible disease” (i.e. cancer) that is “incurable” and “consumes everything, from the soul to the flesh” ([Ilan 2000](#),

38). It is not truly the “rule of the people.” In his view, the rule of the Torah is the only proper form of governance. Democracy is a form of “idolatry,” just like all other modern ideologies, communism, fascism, and liberalism ([Brown 2015, 202](#)).

The Haredi approach holds that the only proper state is a state governed by Jewish Law (*Halakhah*), where religious commandments (*mitzvot*) are forcibly implemented. Such enforcement is considered legitimate, something “natural” that exists, concealed, in nearly every society that abides by rules ([Neugroschel 2002, 47](#)). Democratic elections and parliamentary votes are, in their eyes, petty squabbles based on personal interests and improper collusion, while individual and human liberties offer only illusory freedom. There is no recognition of the concept that all individuals have the right to their own truth, for there is only one absolute, irrefutable truth. Indeed, Haredim across the board support the Halakhic Orthodox monopoly over marriage and divorce, which undercuts the liberties and equality under law of people prohibited from marriage on religious grounds and whose suffering is compared to the purportedly “natural” suffering of children with a disability or genetic disorder ([Neugroschel 2002, 46](#)).

Public discourse terminology among the Haredim is also anti-democratic. They view the liberal media as anti-Semitic and Nazi-like in nature and apply names to it, such as fifth column, snakes, beasts, ruling junta, dictators, cockroaches, and animals, among others ([Ilan 2000, 64](#)). Haredi publications at times engage in dangerous incitement, such as when the Law of the Pursuer (*din rodef*), which prescribes the killing of a person who pursues another with the intent of committing murder, was issued against Shulamit Aloni.¹ Notably, years later this law was applied by certain National-Religious groups and individuals to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995) following the Oslo Accords, thus justifying his future murder.

The negative approach to democracy is also evident in statistical studies that compare the Haredi attitude with that of the population in general. These studies find a significant difference between the Haredi and the non-Haredi population, and, to this effect, the following percentages are but one of several examples.

These findings demonstrate unequivocally that for each question, the Haredi response is less democratically oriented, although the responses also indicate that the non-Haredi population often has a large minority with undemocratic views, and regarding various issues, they are a majority.

There is another aspect to the relationship between the Haredi community and democracy. Democracy is a system of government that protects minorities, and

accordingly, the Haredi minority too is protected by it. Moreover, the large Haredi “centrist” and “moderate” movements know how to exploit the tools that democracy offers them, and thus through massive voter participation in elections, parliamentary representation and parliamentary work, and participation in coalition and government, they have had notable successes in areas of policy and legislation. For example, the exemption from military conscription, which is discussed in Elisheva Rosman's chapter in this volume, and overly generous funding for their institutions. Ben-Haim compares their attitude towards democracy to their approach to technology and other products of Modernity and Enlightenment, as projected in Rabbi Shach's worldview: Both are “bad” and worthy of condemnation, but they are also of benefit to the Haredi population ([Ben-Haim 2004](#), 89–117). For these reasons, Haredi leaders speak of the religious command of voting in elections and, in a reversal of their original stance, they encourage and at times pressure women to vote.

Table 2.1 Israeli Haredi and Non-Haredi Attitudes toward Democracy

| <i>Percentage of people who agree with the above statements in the Haredi vs the non-Haredi communities</i> | <i>Haredi Jews</i> | <i>Non-Haredi Jews</i> |
|--|--------------------|------------------------|
| There is too much democracy in the Jewish, democratic state. | 69% | 42% |
| In cases of conflict between Halakhah and a judicial ruling, Halakhah prevails. | 96% | 21% |
| Arabs are not oppressed in the state. | 68% | 44% |
| Fateful decisions on security and foreign affairs require a Jewish majority. | 94% | 70% |
| Fateful decisions on government, society, and the economy require a Jewish majority. | 84% | 54% |
| Jews in Israel should have extra rights. | 58% | 26% |
| Arabs are a security threat to Israel. | 81% | 40% |
| Arab parties should not be included in the government. | 81% | 57% |
| Voting rights should be denied to anyone who refuses to declare that Israel is the national home of the Jewish people. | 67% | 51% |
| There should be freedom of expression for those who speak out against the state. | 43% | 59% |

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| The media can be trusted. | 4% | 29% |
| The Supreme Court can be trusted. | 6% | 63% |
| Israel needs a strong leader who does not take the Knesset, media, or public opinion into account. | 60% | 36% |
| Efforts to make Israel more democratic are the greatest internal threat. | 12% | 5% |

Source: [Hermann et al. \(2016\)](#), 165–194).

The Haredi Parties

In contrast to religious Zionist parties, even those Haredi political parties that do not have extremist elements are typically opposed to Zionism, do not recognize the Jewish state, have long disputed the spiritual authority of the Chief Rabbinate, advocate segregation of the Haredi community, and maintain minimal cooperation with the non-Haredi public. But they do recognize the state, although not as a Jewish state, and its institutions, run in elections to the Knesset, and participate at times in government coalitions. This in stark contrast with extreme anti-Zionist Haredi groups such as *Neturei Karta*, Satmar, and Brisk Hasidim.² Haredi parties thus fall somewhere along the spectrum between religious Zionists and *Neturei Karta*, although they also vary among themselves, with some closer to Religious Zionism than others. Shas and, in the past, Poalei Agudat Israel, both Haredi parties, have been more moderate in their opposition to Zionism, whereas Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah take a more extremist position on this issue.

By the early 1940s, Poalei Agudat Israel was prepared to cooperate with national institutions, and in 1944 the party declared its support for the establishment of a Jewish state. Its moderation is also reflected in its establishment of collective settlements (*moshavim*) and communal settlements (*kibbutzim*) and its willingness decades later, in 1984, to form an alliance with the religious Zionist party MATZAD ([Fund 2018](#), [Gebel 2017](#)). Shas, too, is closer to Religious Zionism than are Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah, as evidenced since its formation by its willingness to be a full participant in the government. Agudat Israel, in contrast, joined government coalitions during most of 1977–2016, but consistently refused to fill ministerial positions. The year 2016 marked a turning point, with the appointment of Rabbi Litzman as Minister of Health.

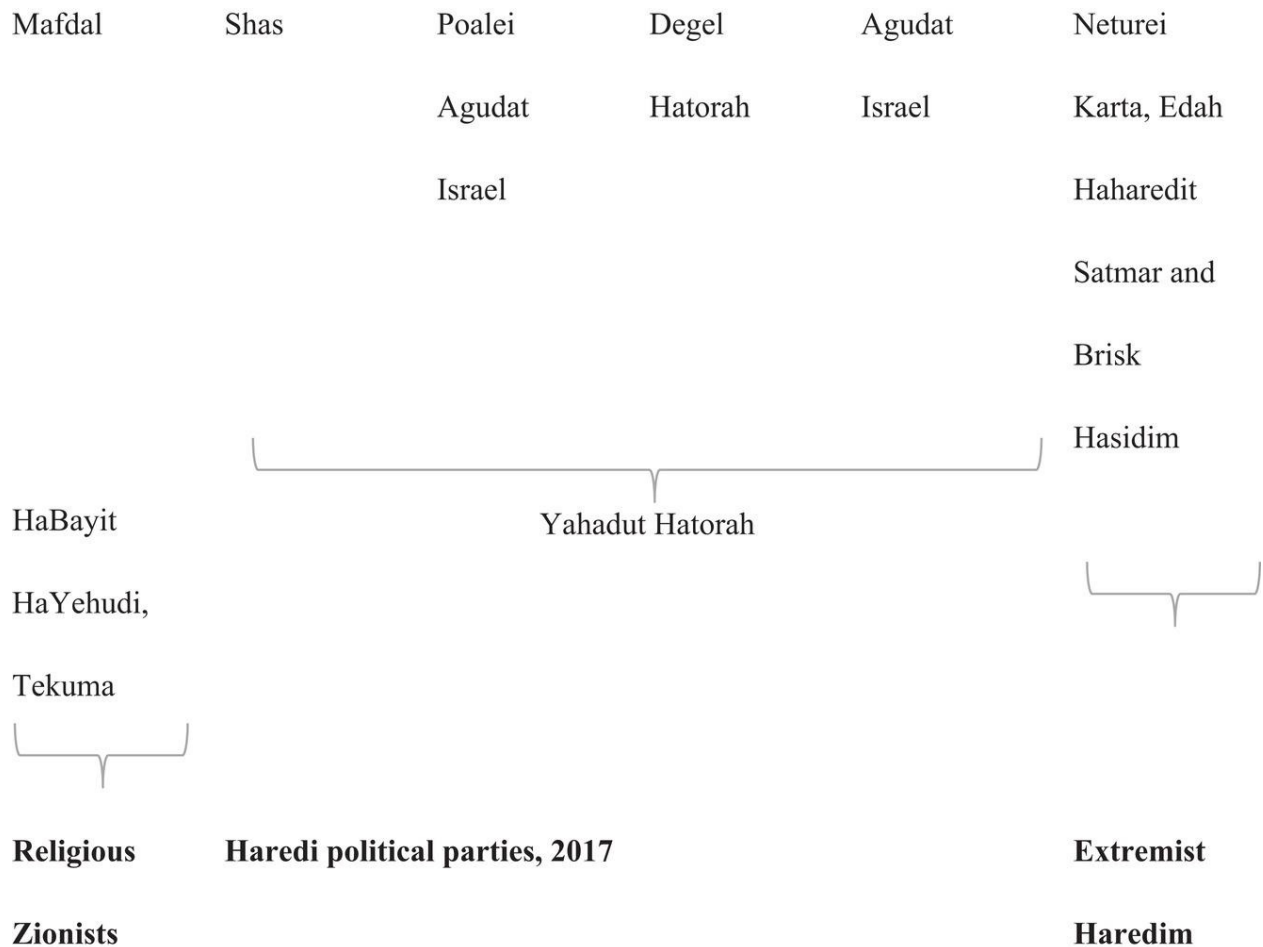


Figure 2.1 Sketch of National Religious (Left), Mainstream Haredi (Center), and Extreme Haredi (Right) Parties and Groups.

The following assortment of remarks by Haredi party members effectively convey their stance regarding the state and the government:

In our view, the government, the court, and the law belong to God alone; God is our king, God is our judge, and God is our legislator.

The leader of Agudat Israel, at the time of Israel's establishment (Y. M. Levin, in [Unna 1983](#), 178).

The existence of a Jewish state is possible only if the Law of the Torah is recognized as the fundamental constitution of the state and the rule of the Torah is recognized by its leadership. A state of Jews that is not based on the foundation of the Torah and its laws is a denial of Israel's origin.

The Council of Torah Sages ([Unna 1983](#), 84).

No compromise is possible between the principle of sovereignty of the Torah and the principle of national sovereignty. There is a conceptual gulf between

them, with no bridge or passage ... The time has come to declare openly and publicly that if we are lovers of Zion, then we are also opponents of Zionism.

M. D. Levinstein ([Unna 1983](#), 139).

Agudat Israel

Agudat Israel was established in Katowice, Poland, in 1912, following a few years of internal efforts, and following the decision taken by the Tenth Zionist Congress (1911) to extend Zionist activity to the cultural sphere ([Bacon 1996](#); [Levin 2011](#)). Some members of the religious Zionist Mizrachi Movement saw this decision of the Zionist Movement as an attempt to impose secular culture on the Zionist movement and withdrew from their party. Together with Hasidic and non-Hasidic Haredi leaders from Eastern and Central Europe, they established the anti-Zionist Agudat Israel, which began to operate in the Land of Israel/Jewish Palestine in 1919. They demanded that the Yishuv refrain from engaging in matters of education and culture, make the Jewish National Council subject to the authority of the Torah, appoint only individuals who observe the Sabbath to leadership positions in Yishuv institutions, and deny women the right to vote. The non-religious parties rejected these demands, and consequently, Agudat Israel boycotted national institutions during the Yishuv era.

Despite these vast conceptual differences, from the late 1920s onward, Agudat Israel, the Yishuv institutions, and the Zionist movement gradually grew closer. After the Arab riots of 1929, which primarily affected the longstanding non-Zionist Jewish community, national institutions and Agudat Israel began to cooperate on matters of security and defense within the framework of the “United Bureau of Yishuv Institutions for the Management of the Arab Question” ([Friedman 1977](#), 286–334). In 1931 the Jewish Agency and Agudat Israel formed an agreement allocating 6.5% of the total quota of Immigration Certificates, issued by the British government in agreement with Zionist authorities, to members of Agudat Israel. The Nazi rise to power, persecution of European Jewry, and the ensuing Holocaust resulted in a victory for the “Eretz Israel orientation” within Agudat Israel – that is, the approach that favored Jewish immigration and settlement, supported the Balfour Declaration, defined as the “Hand of God,” and did not oppose the United Nations resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel/Palestine.

This approach conflicted with that of extreme Haredi anti-Zionists, some of whom, as mentioned, split from Agudat Israel in 1935 and subsequently founded

Neturei Karta in 1938. Agudat Israel's reorientation towards Zionism paved the way for its joining of the Provisional State Council and the Provisional Government of the newly founded Israel, signing the Declaration of Independence and participating in elections to the Constituent Assembly as part of the United Religious Front alliance. In exchange, Agudat Israel was promised that the status quo would be maintained in the following four matters: Matrimonial law, autonomy for the religious educational system, observance of the Sabbath in government institutions, and dietary laws in public institutions. As part of the United Religious Front alliance of all religious parties, Agudat Israel was a member of Israel's cabinet during early statehood (1949–1952) ([Bauer 2011](#)).

The distinguishing characteristic of Agudat Israel is the absolute subservience of the party, its institutions, and Knesset delegation to the religious authority represented by the Council of Torah Sages. It bears emphasizing that the latter is not a theological entity but rather a religious-political body that sets the course of conduct and determines what stance the party should take vis-à-vis political institutions. Agudat Israel did not view the Council of Torah Sages as a political entity in the sense of party politics, but rather as the supreme judicial body of the Second Temple era (*Sanhedrin*) of sorts for the Jews of Eretz Israel, aiming “to strive towards the implementation of the Torah in the lives of the People” ([Weinman 1995](#), 61). The Council, established in 1923, comprises 25 members, including Hasidic leaders, rabbis, and heads of yeshivas who are renowned Torah scholars. During the late 1990s, the council's presidency included the Hasidic leaders of the Vizhnitz, Gur, and Sadigura courts, and the Rabbi of Erlau. In this sense, Agudat Israel is a federation of sorts, comprising various streams of Hasidism, such as Gur, Belz, and Vizhnitz, and large yeshivas, such as Ponevezh, Hebron, and Mir.

Religion is the most important issue on Agudat Israel's platform, while foreign affairs, security, and economic and social matters are, in its view, secondary or, at times, marginal. Given that the religious demands of the Haredi parties do not differ substantively from each other, the clauses relating to religion and state in the platform of United Torah Judaism, a party comprising Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah, published during the elections to the 14th Knesset in 1996 will, for our purposes, serve as an expression of the worldview and operational demands of all Haredi parties. The following, indented text is taken from the election platform of United Torah Judaism. Since it is of major importance, we have decided to present the platform in toto.

The Sabbath

The Holy Sabbath – the heart and soul of the People of Israel – has preserved our unique national character and physical existence over thousands of years of extended exile, and still preserves it. If we had won, the Holy Sabbath would be granted the standing it deserves in the laws of the State of Israel, as a complete and perfect day of rest and sanctity. Now that we have not won, the Sabbath too rests on the status quo in the state, which has supposedly applied to all religious matters since the founding of the state.

United Torah Judaism holds that the status quo has become one-directional, to the detriment of religious issues, and this pattern is systematically destroying the foundations of Judaism and afflicting every aspect of Judaism. We will struggle with all our might against the increasing erosion of the status quo and fight the one-directionality of it. We will continue to demand that permits for work and commerce on the Sabbath and Jewish holy days be revoked.

Encouraged by our past achievements in this area, we will insist on a ruling by a rabbinic authority in all instances that require the application of the principle of the preservation of human life (*pikuah nefesh*), in relation to granting work permits on Saturdays and holidays. The government will be required to encourage and support religious-rabbinical studies and their rulings on this matter.

United Torah Judaism will insist on the just and legitimate right of a majority of the residents of a neighborhood or street to demand that on Saturdays and holidays [the area] be closed to those who would commit desecration.

We will support the implementation of a five-day [work] week as a partial solution to preventing desecration of the Sabbath.

We will form a defensive wall, as in the past, to block any attempt to undermine the sanctity of the Sabbath, and we will struggle against any instance of discrimination against workers and laborers who observe the Sabbath in all sectors of the economy.

Women's Conscription

United Torah Judaism will continue and expand its struggle against women's military conscription and National Service [a program for civil service in lieu of military service] in any form. Agudat Israel has opposed women's military service since its inception, and it will continue its struggle to block any attempt

by any entity to obligate our girls to [serve in] any context whatsoever that is outside the structure of Haredi Judaism.

We will continue to struggle for the definitive repeal of the law on women's conscription as applied to the general population, including on the basis of the clear and decisive conclusions of many public and security-related entities [which found] that there is no justification for women's conscription.

Elimination of the Missionary Plague

United Torah Judaism will not rest or remain silent until the phenomenon of the missionary plague is eradicated, and the evil of missionaries converting Jews is completely eliminated.

Along with all our achievements in the struggle against missionary activity, we will advance legislation aimed at the absolute prohibition of all missionary activities in all forms.

Rejection of Reform and Conservative

Knowing the reality and the miserable truth, United Torah Judaism holds that the Reform Movement and the Conservative Movement have inflicted a spiritual Holocaust on the People of Israel. Through their heretical deeds and denial of the fundamental faith of the Jewish People, these movements have given rise to horrible assimilation among our People. Because of their inspiration and worldview, millions of our People have abandoned their religion and nationality, to the point of assimilation and disappearance among the Gentiles.

These movements have permitted intermarriage and even conducted such marriages themselves. The propaganda campaigns of these destructive movements and their rituals, which are contrary and alien to the spirit and character of the Jewish People, have driven the rates of assimilation and intermarriage to the shocking figures of 70–80% among many communities across the world.

The Conservative and the Reform Jews continue to endanger the physical existence of the People of Israel, in addition to threatening it with its spiritual annihilation, and we regard them and their activities as an acute existential threat both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora. We will make every effort to prevent them from setting foot or gaining any recognition or hold in our Holy Land. We will warn and caution the House of Israel against the fraud and

deception of these movements.

The Jewish Family

The Jewish family, as a unit and in its structure, has always distinguished itself as a source of blessing for a life of sanctity and purity, serving as model and example for all.

United Torah Judaism will work to seal the terrible fissures that have recently disrupted the purity and integrity of the Jewish family and will seek to change and repeal all laws that threaten its purity.

We will continue our struggle to revoke the status of “common-law wife” under Israeli law, and we will guard against any breach so as to prevent violations of Halakhahh regarding matrimonial issues.

We will strive to increase support for families with many children and for housewives and advance the rights of Jewish women who help support their families financially.

Abortion

The Haredi [party] Torah Judaism sees the preservation of a Jewish majority in the state as a principle of the highest order and attributes great importance to promoting the birthrate of the Jewish People and preventing abortions.

We take a very harsh view on the sad fact that since the state's founding, the Jewish People have lost hundreds of thousands of descendants who were slain in their mothers' wombs by means of abortion, thereby violating the supreme principle of the sanctity of human life.

We will work to secure a special government budget for public relations regarding the value of life and the blessing of natural reproduction among the Jewish People. We will demand government support for the voluntary groups that engage in this issue and work among our People with regularity and consistency.

We will struggle against the phenomenon of misguided permissiveness that has spread throughout Israeli society, and which undermines social and moral motivation. We will engage in a wide range of activities to explain the value and vital necessity of the Jewish family and natural reproduction.

The Problem of “Who Is a Jew?”

It is shocking and painful that despite everything our People have endured in recent generations – during the Holocaust, on the one hand, and with the return of a large portion of the People of Israel to its land, on the other – there are still those among the state's leaders, legislators, and judges who offer a new, distorted, and false definition for the sacred and eternal concept, “Jew.”

United Torah Judaism holds that any denial of the unique past of the Jewish People that seeks, pathetically, to ascribe to the Jew a definition that differs from the Halakhic definition, opens the gateway to inclusion of Gentiles and non-Jews among the Jewish People and is likely to cause another Holocaust and division among our People.

To date, we have struggled, and in the future we will continue to struggle boldly and proudly, to amend the Law of Return. We will insist that the noun and adjective Jew/Jewish be defined only in accordance with the Jewish Halakhah. We will safeguard the People of Israel and its purity.

Given the lifting of the Iron Curtain from the Commonwealth of Independent states, and our achievement of having multitudes of Jews from these diasporic countries immigrate to the Land of Israel, the purification of the term Jew is of immediate and practical importance. Alongside our praise for and gratitude to the Creator of the Universe for Jewish immigration to Israel, we must not ignore the bitter and disappointing reality that a large portion of immigrants from the Commonwealth are non-Jews who exploit the laws of the State of Israel, specifically the Law of Return. We view their acquisition of Israeli citizenship as something that dooms us to assimilation, which we must prevent.

The Authority of Rabbinical Courts

The authority of rabbinical courts is extremely circumscribed, limited only to matters of marriage and divorce. Even this authority has been undermined and curtailed, directly and indirectly, through secular legislation and the secular judicial system.

United Torah Judaism takes a very harsh view on interference by the secular authorities in marital issues, which is likely to lead to division in the nation. Our party will struggle against these destructive trends, which make light of the importance of building the Jewish family on the pillars of Torah and Halakhah, and it will fight against civil marriage.

United Torah Judaism rejects and objects to any effort by the archaic judicial system and its leaders to seize control of the life of the People and the state by instilling non-Jewish values.

We will struggle against secular legislation that is aimed at curtailing the authority of rabbinical courts. We will also demand greater authority for rabbinical courts in all judicial matters, as well as legal recognition of the courts' authority in financial matters. We will insist that conversions be conducted and handled by rabbinical courts, not by "special arrangements" that allow for severe infractions.

We will strive for a solution to the extreme hardships afflicting rabbinical courts, which result in a perversion of the law, and we will demand that rabbinical appointments and the appointment of rabbinical judges be conducted in accordance with regional and national needs. We will insist on the preservation of the rabbinical and rabbinical-judicial world and make sure that those who hold these positions be appointed on the basis of their scholarship in Torah and piety alone, with no external or immaterial considerations.

Dietary Laws

United Torah Judaism will continue to ensure that all public institutions maintain kosher kitchens. We will demand that Israel not import non-kosher food. We will reinforce the institutions of "strict" dietary laws (*kashrut*).

We will fight for implementation and enforcement of the law on fraud in matters of *kashrut*, in accordance with our Holy Torah, so as to contain the lawlessness and terrible neglect that prevails as a result of this breach. We will demand that the law be scrupulously upheld and that unruly, greedy lawbreakers be prevented from impeding the rabbis.

Opposition to Anti-Religious Coercion

The political alliance of Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah is concerned about the trend towards anti-religious coercion, which manifests in various forms, overtly and covertly, and in many social and civil spheres, particularly in peripheral, developing areas, immigrant population centers, and areas of new settlement. We will devote our efforts to the struggle against this unacceptable trend, which destroys our social fabric and social stability, and for which there is no place in the life of this country.

We will demand the enforcement of existing laws in all matters related to public expressions that insult the Torah of Israel and religiously observant members of the public, and we will defend Haredi Judaism from those who foster hatred and hostility towards it. We will continue to struggle against any attempt to have Israel's Basic Law includes provisions that might undermine Torah-based Judaism.

Autopsies and Organ Transplants

Proud of its past achievements in preventing autopsies, Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah will continue to guard against autopsies that violate the law.

We will continue to work to prevent organ transplants that do not have approval and instructions from an authorized rabbi.

Preservation of Human Dignity

United Torah Judaism is proud of its consistent, vigorous struggle against the desecration of graves, and will promote appropriate legislation to prevent harm to sites that embody the sanctity of ancient Israelites.

We will demand constant supervision of all archeological excavations, including prior coordination with qualified rabbinical authorities and continuous, consistent safeguarding of graves during all excavations.

We will ensure the preservation of human dignity and Jewish burial customs in accordance with Halakhah, and we will make sure that all deceased bodies and their organs receive a Jewish burial.

Security and Foreign Affairs

Regarding matters of security and foreign affairs, there are strong differences of opinion within Agudat Israel between hawks and doves. Its platforms in this area have adopted a centrist position in the sense that they do not explicitly support territorial compromise, but neither do they insist on “Greater Israel” or on continuing rule over the territories captured in the Six-Day War. The following platform points from various elections typify this centrist approach:

In forging a peace agreement with our neighbors, we will be guided by considerations of defense, security, and life-saving (*pikuah nefesh*). The Yom Kippur War teaches us that territory by itself does not guarantee security, but at

the same time it has also demonstrated to all the vital importance of strategic depth in defending our lives ([Platform, Agudat Israel, 1977](#)).

Eretz Israel, which was granted to us by the Holy One, Blessed Be He, belongs to the People of Israel ... Eretz Israel should not be placed on the negotiating table of the world's nations, and we object to having an international conference on the conflict ... We oppose negotiations with the PLO and the establishment of a Palestinian state ([Platform, Agudat Israel, 1988](#)).

The guiding principle for United Torah Judaism is as follows: Eretz Israel, which was granted to us by the Holy One, Blessed Be He, belongs forever to the Jewish People because of the existence of the Torah, alongside the Halakhic principle that *pikuah nefesh* overrides all else; the delicate balance between these two will be determined, in practical terms, only by the great Torah scholars of the generation. At the same time, we believe in the need for genuine peace in our region and in ending the bloodshed, may the All Merciful protect us. We will demand that our side promote political initiatives and make every effort to reach a peace settlement with our neighbors, while maintaining friendly relations with all peoples and states ([Platform, Agudat Israel, 1996](#)).

In advance of the elections to the 12th Knesset ([Platform, Agudat Israel, 1988](#)), Agudat Israel united with Habad Hasidic court for the first time,³ and included in its ticket representatives of Poalei Agudat Israel as well. The inclusion of Habad in the joint party ticket, named United Torah Judaism that included Agudat Israel, Agudat Israel activists, Poalei Agudat Israel, Hasidic delegates, and Bnei Torah, reinforced the hawkish faction that identified with Gur Hasidism. The prestige of Habad Hasidim enabled Agudat Israel in 1988, and for the first time, to reach Oriental traditionally religious circles, thereby more than compensating for the Haredi-Mizrahi votes it had lost with the establishment of Shas. Beginning in the mid-1970s, Agudat Israel became less isolated than it had previously been. Since 1977 it has been part of the government coalition and engaged in economic and social issues. Thus, for example, in serving as the heads of the Knesset's Finance Committee and the Labor and Welfare Committee. Its expansion motivated Agudat Israel in 1988 to use television campaign advertisements for the first time.

During the coalition crisis of March–May 1990, Agudat Israel supported a Labor-led government, an act which resulted in the withdrawal of the Habad representative from the party's Knesset delegation, but in November 1990 Agudat Israel joined the Likud government. The withdrawal of Habad's support

reduced the reach of Agudat Israel, which substantially weakened following the 1992 elections to the 13th Knesset. In 1992 Agudat Israel ran for elections as part of United Torah Judaism, which also included Degel Hatorah, and did so since then in 1996, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2015, and the recent round of elections in the late 2010s and early 2020s.

Poalei Agudat Israel

A class struggle between Haredi workers and enterprises in Poland led to the establishment of a Haredi workers' party Poalei Agudat Israel in 1922 ([Bacon 1996](#); [Gebel 2017](#)), which advocated “socialism of the Torah” based “not on the theories of Marx but on the laws of God and the Torah of God.” As Dr Isaac Breuer (1883–1946) coined it, it rejected class war but emphasized that “the Torah has never forged an alliance with exploiters” and therefore “justice in relations between a provider of work and the worker” must be demanded ([Rechev 1959](#), 47–49). The party began operating in the Land of Israel in 1923, identifying with the “Eretz Israel orientation” of Agudat Israel. It remained part of worldwide Agudat Israel and usually accepted the authority of the Council of Torah Sages, although at times it formed its own Council of Torah Sages. It supported Jewish immigration and settlement, as well as the establishment of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*, and towards this end accepted lands from the Zionist Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet Leyisrael*). Poalei Agudat Israel was the most so-called Zionist of the non-Zionist Haredi parties, it favored the “concept of a national home,” supported the Peel Commission partition plan in 1937, and in 1944 explicitly called for the establishment of a Jewish state, not as “the beginning of redemption” but rather as “the beginning of the beginning of redemption” ([Brown 2015](#), 100). It additionally declared that it “does not ignore the practical achievements of Zionism in the economic sphere or its historical mission.” It also viewed the state as a source of “salvation for persecuted Jews” and rejected the Haredi position that the state poses a threat of assimilation ([Brown 2015](#), 100).

Poalei Agudat Israel may be described as embodying “Zionism without Zionism” ([Brown 2015](#), 141–142) because it did not deviate from the Haredi consensus that “it is necessary to fight Zionism as a spiritual movement that might divert the Jewish People away from a lifestyle based on the Torah.” Poalei Agudat Israel of the 1970s and 1980s, in contrast to Poalei Agudat Israel of the Yishuv era, was a right-wing, hawkish party on matters of security and foreign

affairs. It advocated the principle of Greater Israel and supported large-scale settlement in the territories captured in 1967. It therefore also forged an alliance – under the name Heritage (*Morashah*) – with the hawkish Religious Zionist Camp in the elections to the 11th Knesset in 1984. As a faction within Agudat Israel, it supported a Likud-led government during the crisis following the dissolution of the national unity government in 1990.

The platform of Poalei Agudat Israel during the elections to the 9th Knesset ([Platform, Poalei Agudat Israel, 1977](#)) contained the following provisions regarding security and foreign affairs:

Foreign Policy and Security

Eretz Israel was bequeathed to our forefathers and to us forever by the Creator of the Universe.

The Land was forcibly taken from us in the past by foreign occupiers, but the People of Israel has never relinquished any part whatsoever of its legacy.

Through God's many acts of mercy and revealed miracles, we succeeded during the Six-Day War of salvation in repelling the enemy and reclaiming for our People the entire Holy City of Jerusalem, our eternal capital, and most of the territories of our historic homeland.

Settlement in all parts of the homeland is now the order of the day, and the government that emerges must regard it as a mission of the highest priority.

We oppose the plans for withdrawal or concession regarding the legacy of our forefathers in Judea and Samaria, and we view such plans as a threat to the security of the State of Israel.

The People of Israel seek peace, and our hand is extended in peace towards our neighbors. Peace will not come through subordination or the dictates of the world's nations. The State of Israel must formulate an independent peace initiative.

Only a firm, clear stance on our part will lead the nations of the region to accept our presence here and will pave the way to peace negotiations between the two sides, on the basis of mutual respect.

The fundamental mistake in the foreign policy of the outgoing government was its agreement to make concessions to neighboring Arab states without any compensation on their part. The government agreed to receive compensation from the United States, which did indeed lead to an arms buildup, but this also increased our dependence.

Peace negotiations between our neighbors and us should be based on mutuality.

Within the framework of genuine peace negotiations there is room for territorial concessions, both in the Golan Heights and in the Sinai, that would not endanger the state and would allow local autonomous rule for the residents of Judea and Samaria as well as the granting of national rights for the self-determination of their citizens.

Poalei Agudat Israel represented a socialist-labor approach within the Haredi camp. Through the Trade Union (*Histadrut*) of Poalei Agudat Israel, the party was linked with the National Trade Union Association (*Histadurt Klalit*), whose members benefitted from the services of the socialized healthcare network and professional trade unions within the General Histadrut. Poalei Agudat Israel disappeared as a political party in the 1990s, when it merged with Agudat Israel in the formation of United Torah Judaism.

Sephardic Guardians of the Torah (Shas)

In contrast to Agudat Israel and Poalei Agudat Israel, which are considered historical parties with roots in the early Yishuv, Shas and Degel Hatorah are relatively new parties, established in the aftermath of ethnic and sectarian crises within the Haredi camp in the 1980s. Shas' origins lay in a successful municipal party that formed in the early 1980s, and it was founded formally in advance of the elections to the 11th Knesset in 1984 at the initiative of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920–2013) and other rabbis from Mizrahi and Sephardi communities, in protest against the discrimination they faced in Agudat Israel institutions ([Feldman 2001](#)). They objected, for example, to the use of Yiddish on the part of the Council of Torah Sages, and to the violation of the rotation agreement that would have ensured the inclusion of a Sephardic representative in the 11th Knesset. Yosef, who served as the Sephardic Chief rabbi from 1973 to 1983, was also angered by the legislation that limited chief rabbis to a ten-year term and therefore forced his retirement. The Ashkenazi Rabbi Shach, who served as head of the network of Lithuanian yeshivas in Agudat Israel,⁴ also supported the formation of Shas. Shach clashed with other prominent Torah scholars in the party, and was particularly furious that the rotation agreement, which he had signed alongside the leader of Gur, was not honored. These organizational efforts in advance of the Knesset elections were bolstered by the success that

Sephardic Haredi parties achieved in the 1983 municipal elections in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, and Tiberias. Particularly surprising were the election results in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, where the Haredi-Sephardic party emerged as the strongest religious party in the city council.

In 1984 Shas drew support from three sectors of the religious population: Sephardic Haredi graduates of Sephardic yeshivas, hundreds of which had been established during Rabbi Yosef's term as Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel; traditionally religious Mizrahi population in development towns and impoverished neighborhoods, who had despaired of secular left-wing as well as right-wing solutions to their hardship; and Ashkenazi students of Lithuanian yeshivas, who responded to Rabbi Shach's call to support Shas and thereby strike a blow against Agudat Israel, which Shach parted ways from in the mid-1980s as mentioned above.

According to [Don-Yehia \(1990, 11–54\)](#), Shas was very successful in attracting non-Haredi traditionally religious Mizrahi voters. For example, in 1988 Shas received 8.5% of all votes in development towns. To reach this population, it did not shy away from using television campaign advertisements, in which it highlighted a religious message of “reclaiming Israel's soul” as well as an ethnic message. Shas has also been very active in social and educational issues, and according to some assessments, the educational network it established, *El Hama'ayan* (literally, to the well), which includes preschools, schools, and yeshivas, is attended daily by hundreds of thousands of children and youth. After the elections of 1984 and 1988, Shas joined national unity coalitions and governments. During 1990–1992, the party joined the right-wing government of Yitzhak Shamir (1915–2012), in contrast to Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah, which participated in the coalition until 1992, but refused any ministerial position, and during 1992–1994 Shas joined the left-wing government led by Yitzhak Rabin – once again in contrast to Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah, which joined the opposition. During 1994–2017, with brief exceptions, Shas joined all the governments, whether led by the Left (Labor), Centrist (Kadimah), or Right (Likud) parties.

The Fundamental Principles of Shas Are the Following:

[The party] aims to nurture the traditional and Jewish values of religious-Haredi Judaism in Israel.

The party strives for the implementation of the Torah and the commandments

in Eretz Israel, in accordance with Halakhah.

The party follows in the path of Sephardic sages in accordance with Mizrahi Jewish heritage in Israel and the Diaspora.

The party views the Council of Torah Sages, headed by the (former) Chief Sephardic Rabbi, our teacher, the learned Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, long and well may he live, as the supreme biblical, Halakhic, intellectual, and political authority in Eretz Israel. [This changed after Yosef's death in 2013.]

The Party's Objectives and Functions Are:

To represent [members of] the public who observe the Torah and commandments, and to prevent discrimination against the religious-Haredi population in Israel;

To preserve Sephardic Judaism, fortify its existence, educate the children of Israel in the spirit of the heritage of Sephardic Judaism, and restore the glory of the past;

To cultivate *ahavat Israel* [the commandment to love all the People of Israel] and the observance of the Torah and commandments in accordance with Halacha;

To establish a society based on the spiritual-Halakhic foundations of the heritage of Sephardic Judaism in accordance with the Torah of Israel in Eretz Israel;

To train party members to implement these values and carry out these missions;

To promote legislation based on the law of the Torah, Halakhah, and the tradition of Israel, including the heritage of Mizrahi Judaism;

To promote religious Haredi education in Eretz Israel, and to advance religious Haredi educational enterprises of all varieties and orientations;

Shas is subordinate to the authority of the Council of Torah Sages, but its ultimate adjudicators between 1984–1988 were Rabbis Yosef and Shach, and, from 1988, Yosef alone, when the members of Degel Hatorah, who recognize the authority of Shach, resigned until the death of Yosef in 2013. For many years, from the founding of Shas and until his death, Rabbi Yosef was president of its Council of Torah Sages. He also determined the composition of rabbis who served on this Council.

Prominent among the political leaders of Shas during 1984–2017 were rabbi

Yitzhak Peretz and Aryeh Deri who graduated from Ashkenazi yeshivas. The selection of Knesset members to represent Shas visibly demonstrates the party's efforts to strike a balance among various Mizrahi ethnic communities, such as Moroccan, Libyan, Tunisian, Yemenite, and Persian.

Shas' stance on matters of foreign policy is unclear. Its two prominent leaders, Yosef and Deri, were known for their dovishness and willingness to compromise. But there are also hawks among Shas' leaders, and the party's supporters and voters are quite visibly hawkish. Thus, on the one hand, Shas leaders prevented an Israeli attack on Iraq during the 1991 US-Iraq war and abstained from voting against the Oslo Accords in 1993, thereby making possible Knesset ratification of the Accords. On the other hand, the Shas delegation to the Knesset has always included overt hawks, such as Eli Yishai, who led the party from 2000 to 2015, and abandoned Shas during the elections to the 20th Knesset in order to join the politically right-wing radical Kahane movement in establishing the party "Power" (*Otzmah*). At times Yosef and Deri also aligned with the hawkish position salient among Shas's supporters and voters, which explains the party's support for the "Golan Heights Referendum Bill" in 1995, requiring a national referendum for any withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and for the policy of massive settlement in territories beyond the Green Line in 2012–2017.

Degel Hatorah

In the lead-up to the elections to the 12th Knesset (1988), Rabbi Shach came to the conclusion that the Haredi rivals of Agudat Israel would be able to increase their support if they ran for the Knesset under a leadership with two "heads," a Sephardic Haredi party (Shas) and an Ashkenazi Haredi party. Accordingly, the Ashkenazi party Degel Hatorah (literally: the flag of the Torah) was founded in 1988 under the authority of Rabbi Shach. Following its split from Agudat Israel and distancing from Shas, Degel Hatorah also established a separate educational system, its own Council of Torah Sages, and its own system of supervision of food production in accordance with dietary laws. The Lithuanian rabbis' reluctance to support Shas, whose leadership was purely Sephardic, was another factor behind Shach's decision to run against Agudat Israel under two "heads." When members of Habad, who are despised by the Lithuanians, joined Agudat Israel, Shach and his supporters could no longer return to Agudat Israel, thus making the formation of Degel Hatorah inevitable. But the division between

Hasidic supporters of Agudat Israel and Lithuanian supporters of Degel Hatorah was not clear-cut or absolute. For example, besides Lithuanians, Degel Hatorah also included Belz Hasidim, while Agudat Israel included a number of Lithuanians alongside various Hasidim.

Indeed, in advance of the elections to the 13th Knesset which took place in 1992, Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah rejoined forces, although Degel Hatorah did not rejoin Agudat Israel. United Torah Judaism, which has been running for elections since these elections is an alliance of Agudat Israel and Degel Hatorah.

Like Agudat Israel and Shas, Degel Hatorah was also subordinate to religious authority under the then-spiritual leadership of Rabbi Shach. Under Shach, Degel Hatorah completely rejected Zionism, and its members regarded Eretz Israel as part of the Diaspora until the arrival of the messiah. Shach repeatedly emphasized that the Torah, not the state, had preserved the People of Israel throughout the generations.

The fundamentalism of Degel Hatorah is also manifest in its refusal until 2016 to hold ministerial positions, in contrast to Shas, and its rejection of television campaign advertising, in contrast to Shas and to Agudat Israel in 1988. The politicians who headed the political ticket in 1988 were Avraham Ravitz (1934–2009), previously a Shas supporter, and Moshe Gafni, previously a representative of Agudat Israel on the municipal council of Ofakim. Degel Hatorah, in contrast to Agudat Israel, Poalei Agudat Israel, and Shas, was a relatively dovish party. Its platform for the elections to the 12th Knesset in 1988 explicitly stated that “the government will make every effort to prevent bloodshed and establish peace” so as to affirm belief in the saying “and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,” out of deep concern for the wellbeing of every Jew anywhere. This dovish approach reflected the views of Rabbi Shach, who at the time had instructed Agudat Israel to vote in favor of the peace treaty with Egypt and against the annexation of the Golan Heights. His position on the question of Judea and Samaria was that “it is indisputable that Eretz Israel is our heritage, bequeathed by our forefathers, but given the situation today, when they are demanding what we have captured, and if we return it they agree to forge peace, this certainly entails a form of salvation. Would it be better if we maintained a state of war?” ([Horowitz 1989](#), 10).

Under Shach, Degel Hatorah also opposed settlements in Judea and Samaria, including the large Haredi city of Immanuel Shach viewed settlement beyond the Green Line as unnecessary “incitement of the gentiles,” particularly the United States. At the same time, as long as Shach was its leader, Degel Hatorah

objected to any alliance with the Left, such as the governments of Rabin and Peres in the early 1990s ([Brown 2015](#), 246–250). Degel Hatorah also demanded action against “the dissemination of obscene pictures” and “the spread of forced conversion by missionary organizations,” and called for a cessation of “autopsies under various pretexts” and of archeological excavations at sites “where there is the risk of uncovering graves.”

Recent Developments

Recent decades have seen dramatic transformations in the character, aims, and power of the Haredi population and in its political leanings. First and foremost, the Haredi community, which was nearly exclusively Ashkenazi before Israel was founded, has become a mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardic population, as reflected in the growth of Shas since the 1980s. Furthermore Haredim have also undergone a process of “Israelization” ([Caplan and Sivan 2003](#)) in the sense that all the Haredi movements are increasingly using Hebrew, and all the major Haredi newspapers – Agudat Israel's *Hamodi'a*, Degel Hatorah's *Yated Ne'eman*, Shas' *Yom Leyom*, and *Hamahaneh Haharedi* of the Belz Hasidim – appear in Hebrew from day one. Their identification with, or at least acceptance of, the State of Israel has also grown. Whereas in the past the Haredim were a “lobby” of sorts, who pursued their own interests (funding for yeshivas, the question of military service, their own educational system) and did not view the formation of a Halakhic Jewish state as realistic, they began to redirect their growing demographic and political power in the early 21st century towards changing the character of the state. In this sense, they more closely resemble Evangelists in the United States or Islamists in the Arab and Muslim world.

The following numbers of seats of Haredi members of parliament since the establishment of the State of Israel suggest that until 1984 their political power was steady, and since then it grew significantly, overall doubled and, at times, closed to tripled. The table includes the combined number of seats in parliament of the Haredi parties (United Torah Judaism and Shas), the election year, and the Knesset/election number.

In addition, Haredi population, political parties, and leadership have undergone a significant political shift towards the Right. According to empirical studies, since the 21st century nearly 100% of the Haredi population identified with the political Right and felt an aversion to the Left and the Center. This was reflected, for example, in direct elections for the premiership, which required

decisively choosing between Right and Left. It is estimated that in the elections of 1996, 1999, and 2003, nearly all Haredim voted for the right-wing candidate ([Ilan 2000](#), 26–28). They viewed the Left as “Zionist” and “heretical” and the Right indeed Zionist but closer to Jewish tradition and “authentic” Judaism. Thus, for example, when Menachem Begin (1913–1992) was elected as prime minister in 1977, they described him as the first “Jewish” prime minister ([Ilan 2000](#), 32). Menachem Friedman and Shachar Ilan argue that the Haredi street always leaned to the Right, but only after the election of a right-wing government did it openly and blatantly express these views ([Friedman 1991](#); [Ilan 2000](#), 32).

Table 2.2 Number of Seats of Haredi Representatives in the Israeli Parliament,

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 |
| 1949 | 1951 | 1955 | 1959 | 1961 | 1965 | 1969 | 1973 | 1977 | 19 |
| 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th | 9th | 10 |
| 10 | 14 | 22 | 16 | 18 | 11 | 18 | 13 | 16 | 16 |
| 1992 | 1996 | 1999 | 2003 | 2006 | 2009 | 2013 | 2015 | 2019 | 20 |
| 13th | 14th | 15th | 16th | 17th | 18th | 19th | 20th | 21st | 22 |

The right-wing orientation of the Haredi public has not completely invalidated the political Left in the eyes of some Haredi leaders, such as Rabbi Yosef, who supported joining the Rabin government, and dovish stances have at times been acceptable even among anti-leftist leaders such as Rabbi Shach. Following the deaths of Yosef and Shach, the Haredi public and political parties have, overall, completely and consistently aligned with the political Right, including its governments and its stances, particularly in matters of security and foreign affairs.

Some questions remain open for future research and development: Will the demographic growth of the Haredi population persist or ebb as it did in the Arab-Muslim population? Indeed, a decline in demographic growth could change predictions about the growing political power of the Haredi Bloc. Another question is whether the Haredi parties will completely fuse with the Right, and thus the Likud will become more orthodox, thereby paradoxically weakening specific Haredi political power.

A similar, yet different, question is whether the Haredi trend to the nationalist Right is irreversible. The answer to this question has crucial implications for Israeli politics. Another, social question with political implications is whether the aforementioned process of “Israelization” within Ashkenazi Haredi circles will continue, or whether a backlash by the Haredi establishment is possible.

Notes

1. [“The law says that he who undermines the foundation of religion and hates religion in fact hates his own existence and is an enemy of all of Israel, and must be sentenced as a pursuer, and this member of Knesset \[Shulamit Aloni\] is a pursuer” \(Ilan 2000, 51–53\).](#)
2. [The name *Neturei Karta* comes from Aramaic, meaning the “guardians of the city walls.” Its founders split initially from Agudat Israel in 1935 and founded it in late 1938. Its members are residents of the old Yishuv \(the pre-state Jewish community\), numbering several hundred families in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak. Communities of *Neturei Karta* also reside in New York and London. They see the establishment of the State of Israel as forcing the end of days, i.e. the messianic era, which is forbidden to Jews, and would therefore prefer foreign rule in The Land of Israel at this time. Unlike Agudat Israel, they oppose any cooperation with the state. They do not pay taxes, do not participate in elections, and do not accept funding from the state. The government does not enforce its authority over them, granting them an autonomy of sorts.](#)
3. [Lubavitch Hasidism, also known as Habad \(Hebrew acronym for Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge\), was founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, and is unique in its extensive framework aimed at bringing Jews closer to Judaism by making it accessible to non-scholars.](#) The role of the rabbi in Habad is even more prominent than in other forms of Hasidism because he is an organizational leader as well as a Halakhic authority. Until World War I, Habad was centered in Lubavitch, Belorussia, but it later moved to Poland and subsequently settled in the United States. The movement is headed by the Schneerson family dynasty, descendants of Rabbi Shneur Zalman. Until the elections to the 12th Knesset, Habad was considered an apolitical movement, even though its sixth leader was one of the founders of Agudat Israel, but during these elections his successor, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, ordered his followers to vote for Agudat

Israel. Habad's involvement in the election campaign apparently stemmed from the personal rivalry between Rabbi Schneerson and Rabbi Shach, the “custodian” of Degel Hatorah and Shas. This rivalry stems from Shach's critique of the acute messianic elements of Habad. Habad is opposed to Zionism ([Ratzabi 1996](#)), but its positions on territories captured in 1967 and on Israeli Arabs are extremely hawkish.

4. [This is a Haredi educational system operating in a format that originated in yeshivas of Lithuania. The students are educated in boarding schools, in an elitist method aimed at producing prodigies and based on in-depth examination of the material studied and rigorous, detailed analysis of every issue. Accordingly, the Lithuanian yeshiva differs from the Hasidic yeshiva, where most of the students are expected to leave the yeshiva in order to provide for their families. The Hasidic yeshiva's method is intended to impart the most comprehensive knowledge possible to its students, and it therefore focuses on the quantity of material rather than its in-depth understanding. This Lithuanian educational model was transferred after the Holocaust to Israel, where Lithuanian yeshivas are now scattered throughout the country. The leading yeshiva is Ponevezh in Bnei Brak, and other major yeshivas include Hebron, Mir, and Slobodka.](#)

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3 Haredim and Conscription to the IDF

Perspectives, Perceptions, Prospects¹

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Introduction

For many Israelis, any discussion about the Haredi community begins and ends with conscription, or rather: the lack of Haredi military service in a country that still has a conscription-based military. It seems that the conversation in the public sphere concerning this topic spans many issues and is more akin to listening to a reenactment of the tower of Babel than a true in-depth discussion. The following chapter seeks to sort through the issue of military service, conscription and the Haredi sector, and highlight the main categories of issues within this debate. In short, it asks: what are Israelis really talking about when they discuss the conscription (or lack thereof) of Haredim?

The debate regarding Haredim and military service can be viewed through three key discussion clusters: A. Why are Haredim exempt *de facto* from conscription and is this justifiable? B. What can be done about conscription of Haredim and is there a way to encourage this community to enlist? C. Does Israeli society really want Haredim to be conscripted to the IDF? These three discussion clusters sometimes intersect and affect each other but exist independently and are raised in the media (national and sectarian), in court and in the government, as well as many other public and private spheres, without necessarily connecting to each other. For example, before elections, the second

discussion cluster concerning how to encourage or force conscription is typically debated heatedly, but not always in connection with the other two discussions. Haredim largely ignore the first cluster (why are Haredim exempt from service), taking for granted that their position is the only justifiable one and using this position as a starting point for any further debate. For general Israeli society, this cluster is pivotal and revisited frequently. Both these clusters are not automatically associated with the question of conscription and military service of Haredim being desirable on a national level.

Despite political changes, social agendas and the time elapsed, it seems that these three clusters remain stable. They form the main framework for the debate surrounding Haredi military service and discussants return to them again and again over the years. Following these clusters might give better insight to the topic as a whole and allow for a broad perspective on the entire issue. In this respect, the current chapter does not seek to explore Haredi military service or indeed what is or is not desirable. Rather, it would like to place the discussion in context and create a playing field within which a true discussion can take place.

The following chapter will be organized according to these three discussion clusters. It will map out the main topics and subtopics in each. The discussion clusters are phrased according to the way they are voiced in the relevant discourse. As such, they are not neutral questions, but rather indicate a specific framing of the question at hand. Likewise, their analysis relates to the weighted framing of each. The chapter concludes with a number of observations regarding the parallel discussions and the implications they have for the issue itself.

Why Are Haredim Exempt De Facto from Conscription and Is This Justifiable?

Before delving into the discussion cluster regarding what is perceived as the Haredi exemption from service, a short historical introduction is in order. Military service in Israel is perceived as a civic duty. Participation in conscription, in essence, indicates a willingness to be included in the collective and to be recognized as an Israeli citizen. In this respect, it is more than just military service, and more than recognition of the law as a set of binding rules that create a collective identity ([Rosman 2016](#)). It is a renewal of the civil contract whereby citizens agree to give up part of their autonomy in exchange for participation in the collective and the rights and benefits it affords. It is from this perspective that the refusal of the Haredi community to accept conscription

is viewed: general Israeli society sees this refusal as a gross breach of the civil contract on the part of the Haredi community. Whereas all Jewish Israeli citizens, men and women, who are physically fit for service are required to sacrifice time, health and, at times, their lives, for the collective, Haredi women are exempt and Haredi men can defer their service (in what usually results in exemptions later on). They do, however, still enjoy all the rights of equal citizens. Most Israelis see such actions as unfair and this issue has been one of the focal points of the relationship between the Haredim and Israeli society in general since 1948 until today.

The reality whereby Haredi citizens do not serve was not always the norm. Male and female religious soldiers of all types served in paramilitary pre-state organizations and joined the fledgling IDF. Haredi soldiers were no exception.² While there were always those in Haredi society who felt that Zionism was the antithesis of Orthodox Judaism and were vehemently opposed to the creation of the state for religious reasons, there were also always those who were willing to accept it.³ However, partial Haredi agreement to military service evolved very quickly due to two parallel processes: the efforts to exempt Torah scholars from service and the anti-religious sentiment within the IDF.

Haredi leadership feared conscription and as early as March 1948 began efforts to exempt yeshiva students from enlistment. They were aided in their efforts by Religious-Zionist leaders ([Warhaftig 1988](#), 229–261). Appealing to David Ben-Gurion, a coalition of Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox leaders explained that in the wake of the Holocaust, there was a need to rebuild a cadre of Torah scholars (*Talmidei Hakhamim*), specifically in Israel, and therefore scholars should be exempt from service. Ben Gurion agreed to a deferment – not an exemption – for 400 students.

At the same time as the efforts to exempt scholars were taking place, it was becoming clear that the IDF was not a hospitable place for religious men and women. The most famous case was an incident in July 1948, when two religious soldiers were court martialed for refusing a direct order to cook on Shabbat. This case was widely publicized, reached the Knesset and created uproar in the IDF and outside of it ([Brown 2017](#), 300–301; [Ehrenvald 2017](#), 262–265). Similar to other cases, this one affected the Haredi community and gave the impression that serving in the IDF was akin to serving in a gentile military. Historically, Jews viewed military service in the Diaspora with suspicion and as a way to force them to abandon their religion. The most prominent example for this attitude is the case of the Cantonists in 19th century Tsarist Russia.⁴ The general Jewish

view on military service before the establishment of the State of Israel was that “nice Jewish boys” did not enlist. For the Haredi world, continuing to uphold this approach was completely in vain with traditional views.

This dual process brought about the deferment known as “Torah is his vocation” (*Torato Umanuto*), which has been broadly discussed ([Barak-Erez 2010](#); [Brown 2017](#); [Cohen 1994](#); [Drory 2009](#); [Ilan 1999](#); [Warhaftig 1988](#)). Since religion could not be cited as the basis for exemption from conscription,⁵ efforts were concentrated on the issue of service itself. At its most basic level, the deferment is founded upon the Haredi interpretation of the dilemma of military service versus Torah study. This dilemma can be simplistically depicted as follows: Jewish men are obligated to devote themselves to study roughly from the age of 16 (or 18) to 22 (or 24), after which they may leave formal Torah study educational frameworks. Serious Torah scholars, who will continue to study their entire lives, are seen as a minority. Yet anyone who is exclusively immersed in the study of Torah, and not otherwise occupied, can be seen as one whose studies are his vocation (*Torato Umanuto*). According to Jewish Law (*Halakhah*), such a scholar is exempt from certain communal burdens. For example, Torah scholars are exempt from taking part in contributing to the fortification of the city they live in (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra Tractate, 7a). However, there are also exceptions. Some halakhic scholars, led by Maimonides, ruled that in times of obligatory war (*Milhemet Mitzvah*), Torah scholars must also participate and cannot claim that their studies trump conscription (*Hilkhot Melakhim Umilkhamoteihem*, 5).

While Religious-Zionism adopted this interpretation and agreed to the drafting of Torah scholars, in time through the Hesder program ([Cohen 1997](#); [Rosman-Stollman 2014](#)), the Haredi community has not. Haredi halakhic interpretation sees Torah scholars as playing an equal part in the defense of society through study, not enlistment. It is their studies that truly protect the inhabitants of Israel and allow soldiers to be victorious on the battlefield. Without the study of Torah, all would be lost. Therefore, Jewish society in Israel needs both soldiers in uniform as well as “soldiers” who are immersed in the study of Torah and neither can be successful without the other ([Hakak 2009](#); [Leon 2017](#); [Stadler 2007](#); [Stadler and Ben Ari 2003](#)). In other words, Torah scholars are essential to the physical existence of Israel no less than (military) soldiers and therefore, they must be exempt from service.

Now that the historical context is clear, we may turn to the discussion cluster regarding the justification for the *de facto* exemption. This cluster focuses on

several themes. The first theme is mainly historical. Various scholars trace the history of Haredim in arms and concentrate on changes in the way Haredi society views conscription and the IDF. This type of discussion features both in academic writing ([Brown 2017](#); [Ehrenvald 2017](#)) as well as the media ([Ben Haim 2002](#); [Friedman 2017](#); [Hoberman 2017](#)).

Additionally, the media follows political events as they develop and reports on them: where does the issue of conscription of Haredim stand? Who is who in the issue of conscription? What are the main issues on the public agenda?⁶

One sub-discussion within this theme deals with the *NAHAL Haredi* program, also called, *Netzah Yehudah*, as well as other IDF programs designated primarily for Haredim.⁷ Not much scholarly material has been written on the *NAHAL Haredi* ([Drory 2009](#)). Therefore, this sub-topic features mostly in memoirs and the media ([Gervich 2003](#); [Gronich 2015](#); [Meir 2002](#); [Noy 2016](#); [Rifkin 2013](#); [Tzuriel 2004](#); [Zoldan 2009](#)). Some of the questions asked and dealt with in this context are: Just how Haredi is this unit? Are its members “true” Haredim or rather *Shababnikim* (young men who dress as Haredim, but whose personal conduct is somewhat removed from Haredi lifestyle) whose families see conscription as a way to deal with their deviation from accepted Haredi life? How does this unit function on a day-to-day basis? Is the *NAHAL Haredi* actually comprised of Religious-Zionists rather than “real” Haredim? Is it successful in socializing its members so that they become “good” Israeli citizens? Does it conscript mainly Mizrahi (i.e. Middle Eastern and North African origin) Haredim, exempting Ashkenzi (i.e. European origin) Haredim? And so forth.

The second theme within this discussion cluster is halakhic, meaning it exists within the context of religious law (*Halakhah*) in its Orthodox interpretation. It is a mainly internal discussion headed by Religious-Zionists and using religious terminology. While Haredi halakhic decisors do not usually address this topic, Religious Zionist ones debate it fervently. They do not confront the Haredi position directly, but rather discuss the issue of conscription versus Torah study through a halakhic prism and it is obvious that they are attempting to prove the Haredi position wrong halakhically. Rabbis such as the late Aharon Lichtenstein (1933-2015), litigators such as Aviad Hacohen, and the late Supreme Judge Menachem Elon (1923-2013), and other public figures have engaged the Haredi narrative within the halakhic context, challenged it, and argued against it ([Y. Cohen 1994](#); [Elon 2002](#); [Hacohen 2002](#); [Lichtenstein 2002](#); [Piron 2012](#)).

It is far more difficult to find Haredi halakhic writings on conscription.⁸ In the

Haredi world, the idea that it is possible to serve in the military (any military, and not just the IDF) and remain religious, that it could be permitted halakhically to serve, or that military service could be more important than study, is overall inconceivable ([Zoldan 2009](#), 22–27).⁹ There is no conversation to engage in because the Haredi side does not accept that there is anything to discuss halakhically. A survey of the Haredi press in Israel makes it very clear that the conversation can only begin from the axiom that Torah study always trumps military service ([JDN 2016](#)). At times, certain Haredi publications or publicists will admit that the issue is complicated when it comes to Haredi men who do not take their studies seriously and many Haredim understand that the rest of Israeli society disagrees with their view of reality. But this does not change the basic premise that Torah study, in the Haredi world, is a perfectly acceptable reason (not an excuse) for not serving in the military.

The third theme in this cluster is a political-legal one: is it constitutional to allow such an exemption in a country where conscription is mandatory for all Jewish men at the age of 18. This theme posits that the exemption is in stark contrast to the principle of equality. All citizens are and should be equal in their rights and obligations, and exempting Haredim *de facto* from compulsory military service, violates this principle ([Ben Bassat, Dahan and Kremnitzer 2013](#)).

This theme usually looks at the deferment in broader political-legal contexts and many times uses the issue of conscription of Haredim as a case study for larger legal issues in Israel. For example, since the question of the legality of the deferment was brought before Israel's Supreme Court by common citizens, this is a good case for examining *locus standi* in Israel ([Negbi 1971](#)). Likewise, it is a case study in judicial review ([Nehushtan 2002](#)).

Within this theme, too, some writers focus on the historical aspect of the legality of the deferment and what the implications of this are in the political and legal spheres ([Barak-Erez 2010](#); [Perez 2014](#)). Others focus on the Tal Law in this context.

The Tal Law began as a report by the Tal Committee, headed by retired Supreme Court Justice Zvi Tal (1927-2021), in 2000. The committee was asked to compile a report regarding the *de facto* exemption of over 30,000 yeshiva students, and a law was drafted on the basis of the committee's recommendations, effective as of 2003. The idea behind the Tal Law was that conscription cannot be forced on the Haredi community. However, in order to allow young Haredi men to eventually enter the workforce, it proposed a very

flexible military service track or the possibility of national civilian service instead of military service ([Almasi 2012](#)). Without military service, Haredi men are unable to work legally (and, as result, pay taxes) since they are considered as being included in the “Torah is their vocation” arrangement: Torah study is their “job,” and they are prohibited from any other employment. Should they leave their studies, they will be conscripted, since leaving the yeshiva means leaving the “Torah is their vocation” arrangement, thereby revoking their deferment. This produces a vicious circle whereby Haredi men can only leave their studies and join the workforce after the age they are officially exempt from military service. As a result, they remain registered at their yeshiva, even if they are not studying, cannot work and are usually supported by their wives, parents or in-laws. If they do work, they are not paid legally and therefore are not well-paid (and consequently do not pay taxes).¹⁰ The Tal Law aimed to rectify this situation by constructing a framework allowing Haredi men to either serve a short time in the military, receive an honorable discharge that would allow them to work legally; or to serve in a non-military setting within the Haredi community itself, receive a legal exemption from military service and also be allowed to join the workforce.

However, the law was ruled unconstitutional¹¹ by the Israeli Supreme Court in February 2012 and the Knesset was unable to renew it. The discussion sub-theme surrounding the Tal Law focuses for a large part on its history and legality (for example, [Yinon 2012](#)). It also connects to the next discussion cluster regarding the means by which it is desirable to increase Haredi conscription, as we shall see. This latter category is essentially normative and asks whether or not the Tal Law was “good” from the point of view of the state: did it bring about a rise in the number of Haredim who served in the military or civilian national service? Did it encourage more Haredim to leave the yeshiva world and join the workforce? ([Elran and Ben Meir 2012](#); [Gal 2010](#)).

At this point, the debate tends to splinter into sub-discussions. In connection with the previous historical theme, as well as the following discussion cluster regarding practical options aimed at changing the situation, there are those who view the issue through a strictly judicial prism. For example, [Sapir \(2001\)](#) tries to formulate rules of play for the political discussion between the government and the Haredi leadership. While this might make perfect sense to secular Israelis, the entire terminology and jargon hold no meaning in the Haredi sphere. Where Sapir would like to discuss equality in the eyes of the law, the Haredi view of the study vs. service dispute sees this entire issue in a different light. In

its view, as seen above, equality is being strictly maintained ([JDN 2016](#)).¹² This is obviously not a discussion with both sides conversing, but two monologues taking place simultaneously. Each side is convinced its position is the correct one and that the other side is wrong. There is no dialogue and when one of sides does stop to listen, it is in order to find flaws in the adversary's arguments and use them to an advantage.

This discussion cluster is perhaps the most constant. It has been ongoing since Israel's birth and remains a contentious topic. At times, it is deliberated together with the following cluster, but also exists independently. It features regularly in academic scholarship, and is referred to by politicians, lawmakers, and laypersons fairly regularly. As stated, each side is completely entrenched in their position regarding the legality and morality of the present situation.

What Can Be Done about Conscription of Haredim and Can They Be Encouraged to Enlist?

This discussion cluster focuses on the ability of Israeli society to convince Haredim to enlist or to participate in National Civil Service (*Sherut Leumi Ezrahi*). Its point of departure is, by definition, that conscription is desirable and that Haredim who do not serve are committing a felony or, at the very least, are guilty of immoral behavior by having others die for their own personal security without shouldering part of the security burden.

Understandably, the key discussants in this category are non-Haredi writers (academic and otherwise), with a strong tendency toward policy recommendations. Haredi writers and participants in this discussion cluster focus on disputing the core premise of the argument: that conscription of Haredim is even an option. This is mainly due to the fact that the IDF is unable to provide an atmosphere befitting Haredi lifestyle and therefore Haredim who do enlist realize this is a mistake or – worse – become secular ([Meir 2002](#); [Nisani 2014](#)). In other words, deferments are an essential component of Haredi citizenship and as such cannot be disputed. The idea of encouraging Haredim to enlist, according to Haredi writers, is invalid in the current reality and even discussing it is wrong.

The issues raised within this discussion cluster from the secular and Religious-Zionists in Israeli society focus on two central points: Can military conscription of the Haredi sector be enhanced and how successful is it in integrating Haredim in Israeli society post-service; and would it be feasible to

substitute military service for civilian national service in the Haredi community as a worthy option, comparable to military service.

For decades, the theme concerning devising ways to convince Haredim to conscript willingly, spoke of a mixture of “carrots” and “sticks,” with these being a combination of personal gains and sanctions for conscripts/draft-dodgers and gains and sanctions for the community as a whole. For example, the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), a think tank which has been debating the issue at length, presented a number of policy recommendations over the years ([Ben Bassat, Dahan and Kremnitzer 2013](#); [Malchi 2017](#); [Stern and Zicherman 2013](#)). Similarly, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), an additional think tank, has also produced a policy study on the subject ([Elran and Ben Meir 2012](#)), as have others ([Ilan 1999](#)). Sanctions include discontinuing government funding for yeshivas that do not send non-studying students to the IDF; and court marshaling for draft dodgers. Incentives include the creation of service tracks specifically tailored to Haredi needs; personal monetary grants from the state for those who enlist early; yeshivas that encourage students to enlist will be compensated with government funds; the IDF will only conscript Haredim that it has need for and who are physically fit for service whereas others will be exempted. As expected, every policy recommendation has its own unique arguments, but all touch upon these main points to varying extents.

As a rule, policy studies stress that due to demographic trends, the Haredi community will comprise a larger and larger percentage of Israeli society and therefore conscription of this sector is inevitable. If Haredim will enable its non-scholarly youth to enlist, it will enjoy a broader consensus in general Israeli society, there will be more recognition and legitimacy for those who do study, Haredi society will enjoy better quality of life due to participation in the job market, and finally, the state will continue to fund yeshivas.

Think tanks and policy studies stress that military service assists in the integration into general Israeli society and the job market ([Malchi 2017](#)). This is not necessarily what Haredi leadership seeks to promote. The Haredi world identifies with the idea of being removed from the (material) world and focusing on living a godly life. Becoming part of general Israeli society is not a goal or an incentive ([Brown 2017](#); [Leon 2017](#)).

On the other hand, it seems that individuals understand the benefits of service and are more willing to consider the possibility of conscription than in the past due to these benefits. Although they are not interviewed in Haredi press, Haredi soldiers and veterans report ways in which their service allowed them to acquire

skills that later enable them better quality of life ([Malchi 2017](#); [Biur 2015](#)).

This is not to say that no negotiations take place between Haredi leadership and the state regarding conscription. Over the years there have been various attempts to engage and find an acceptable compromise. One of the sub-topics in this context has been regarding sanctions against those who refuse to register for the draft or against those who are called up for duty but refuse to report to the IDF, with some saying sanctions are imperative, and others claiming that it is better to reach an agreement rather than impose sanction that will only antagonize the Haredi sector.

In order to understand the discussion of sanctions, it is important to mention the Shaked Committee and the changes made to the Security Service Law in its wake. After the Supreme Court ruling that the Tal Law was unconstitutional, the [Peri Committee \(2013\)](#) presented a draft law that was elaborated upon by the Shaked Committee in [2014](#). The Shaked Committee's draft for a new conscription law recommended a two-tiered process. During the first stage, to take place during the following three years (2014–2017), there would be no forced conscription of Haredim. Yeshiva students could continue to defer their service. The idea being that during this first stage, the Haredi community would have the opportunity to adjust to the changes proposed. At the same time, this period required the Haredi community to meet a minimum quota of conscripts, meaning that the state expected cooperation from the Haredi sector and that the leadership would encourage young men who were not serious scholars to enlist.¹³ On the other hand, if the quotas were not met, there would be implications (mostly financial) for the community. The Shaked Committee also hoped to use this transitional period to try and enable Haredim to enter the work force. During this transitional period, men over the age of 24 could receive an exemption that would allow them to join the workforce. Men between the ages of 18 and 24 could extend their deferment until the age of 24, at which point they could receive an exemption and join the workforce. In short, this period was supposed to assist the Haredim in adjusting to a new reality, introducing the idea of conscription quotas, while also allowing entire age cohorts to be exempt from service legally and be able to seek proper employment.

The Committee proposed that during the following step, beginning July 2017, the minister of defense would still be able to confirm deferments for Haredi scholars. However, the quotas for conscription and/or civilian service for Haredim would be binding.¹⁴ If met, those who received deferments could continue to do so until the age of 26, when they would receive exemptions. If

quotas were not met, all Haredim aged 21 would be eligible for service. This means that Haredim who do not come to the conscription centers for the first stage of conscription, or who are summoned for conscription and fail to appear, are subject to criminal sanctions since they are breaking the law. This is a new reality in the relationship between the Haredim and the state, and was seen by many Israelis as a step toward equality.

Following the accepted view in Israeli society regarding the linkage between the Haredim deferments and general conscription, the Shaked Committee also shortened military service for men from 36 to 32 months. In other words, more Haredi conscription will enable a more equally distributed service for all. More Haredim in uniform enable shorter service for all. This is a theme that features prominently in Israeli discourse and is echoed in the official name of the Shaked Committee: The Committee for the Equal Distribution of the [conscription] Burden.

Obviously, the Shaked Committee chose a different path when dealing with the issue of conscription. While the Tal Law Committee came to the conclusion that it is impossible to achieve equality concerning military service and that Haredi lifestyle is so incompatible with military life that a better solution must be found, even if it meant that Haredim would not serve the way other Israelis do, the Shaked Committee decided that this was not a social price Israeli society was willing to pay. Since the Supreme Court ruling regarding the Tal Law essentially said that such a clearly unequal compromise was unacceptable, the Shaked Committee could allow itself to take more drastic measures.

The Shaked Committee and its result, the new conscription law, demonstrate that equality in its most narrow interpretation is the prism through which this discussion cluster is viewed. General Israeli society sees conscription as a burden all of society must bear equally and only actual presence in uniform counts. Any attempt to substitute military service with any other option cannot be seen as “equal” and is therefore not part of the conversation. This is the discussion cluster typically focused on by the media and brought to center-stage during election seasons. It served as a central concern in many an election platform, most recently by the Yesh Atid party headed by Yair Lapid in the 2015 elections.

Will the new law and the sanctions that it imposes increase conscription? Many – both in the Haredi camp and outside of it – say no. The new law will only cause antagonism and forcing Haredim to enlist will not encourage integration ([Ettinger 2015](#)). The 2017 demonstrations by the so-called Jerusalem

Faction, led by Rabbi Shmuel Auerbach (1931-2018) until his death, prove that a vocal part of Haredi society will not comply with the new reality. However, this is a new reality still unfolding and it is impossible to predict what will happen next. There are those within the Haredi camp who see the new law as a fair compromise ([Bloch 2014](#)), and it is left to be seen what its effects will be, as many writers note.

Seeing conscription as a prerequisite to equal citizenship does not agree with the second theme in this discussion cluster, which focuses on using civilian service as a befitting substitute for military service. This theme has been elaborated on extensively since the Tal Law came into play (2003) and continues well into the present decade, despite the Shaked Committee and the subsequent conscription law.

Religious women, per the exemption afforded them by law, as well as non-Jewish minorities, can volunteer for civilian national service (*Sherut Leumi*). Civilian service includes various educational posts in school and communities, volunteer work at hospitals, as well as in the police force and some government offices. Some of these posts are very similar to military postings and at times soldiers and volunteers serve in the same capacity.¹⁵ Service is usually for one year, although many religious women opt to volunteer to serve for two years, in order to maintain equality with their counterparts who serve for approximately two years in uniform.

Within this theme, scholars and policy formulators ask a number of questions. The first focuses on the dilemma of equality: can civilian service truly serve as a viable substitute for military service in terms of socialization, meaningful contribution to society and a general feeling of collectiveness? ([Gal 2010](#); [Levy 2015](#)).

Some contend that military service must be the norm for Haredim ([Ben Bassat, Dahan and Kremnitzer 2013](#); [Stern and Zicherman 2013](#)). It is unfair to have mandatory conscription for all Israelis and yet allow Haredim to choose not to risk their lives in uniform, serve within their community and still benefit as though they served in the same way soldiers do. Others state that if the choice is between no service at all or civilian national service, some service is better than none ([Gal 2010](#)). Interestingly, Haredi writers do not address the issue of national service. It seems that they are far more engaged in the first theme, and less in this one.

In general, it seems that this second theme is not as popular and while Israeli society tends to accept that civilian service can be an adequate substitute to

military service in some cases, it is harder to garner support for it as a collective solution in the Haredi case.

For the Haredi sector, this discussion cluster embodies the most problematic aspect of the issue. For parts of the Haredi community, and specifically for a part of Haredi leadership, conscription is a make-or-break issue: They are willing to have everything hinge on it. The last round of demonstrations during 2017 surrounding the need for a new arrangement regarding conscription has shown just how entrenched Haredi leadership is concerning this issue. For example, the main theme in Rabbi Auerbach's speech at the demonstration in March 2017 was “do not compromise!” ([Yaakovi 2017](#)). Such a statement automatically shuts down any possibility for dialogue. The issue is seen as a way for secular Israel to defeat Haredi lifestyle and humiliate the Haredi community: “They are looking to flatten us” ([Rabinovitch 2017](#)).¹⁶ Although not all of the Haredi community views the current situation in such dire terms, the issue of conscription is very central for its leadership and a very tangible point of contention with the secular establishment.

Furthermore, when political or religious members of the Haredi leadership seem to be entering a dialogue with the IDF or the state concerning conscription, Haredi press is, for the most part, not supportive. Both articles and opinion pieces portray those entering a dialogue as sellouts. For example, when a Haredi member of Knesset met with military officials, Haredi media chose to publicize the public outcries against him. For example: “Pashkevils: MK Moses will be remembered forever in infamy,” [since he visited Haredi soldiers to show support] ([Shkedi 2011](#)).

That said, there are those in the Haredi world who feel that the current situation is not so dire, as noted above, and that the Haredi world should accept a compromise, since it is fair and allows the Haredi community to continue to study, for a large part ([Bloch 2014](#); [Roth 2017](#)). It is possible that after the death of the aforementioned Rabbi Auerbach and over time there will be less opposition to finding a compromise.

This is perhaps the only category of issues within the discussion where both sides are willing to listen to each other to some extent. Israeli society realizes that it should take Haredi needs and constraints into account if it is to convince Haredi youth to leave their social fold. Conversely, the Haredi community seems to understand to some extent that it should change in order to survive and that not all of its youth are truly studying. However, this does not seem to translate into tangible results.

Does Israeli Society Really Want (or Need) Haredim to Be Conscripted to the IDF?

This discussion cluster is the least vocal and many times those who engage in it are the object of ridicule and chagrin. To question the fact that Haredim must be conscripted in a highly unpopular position in Israeli society. However, in recent years a number of scholars and publicists have begun to voice their misgivings on the subject. The two main themes in this cluster focus on the effect Haredi conscription will have on the IDF and Israeli society; and is Haredi conscription a “real” issue or mainly an emotional-ideological one.

While this is primarily an internal discussion within general Israeli society, the Haredim contribute to this cluster by enhancing two points: that conscription will have effects on the IDF that most of Israeli society will see as negative (such as the marginalization of women); and that the more Israeli society pushes, the more Haredi society will resist conscription and fight it. In the long run, such a course of action will not achieve any of its goals and is a waste of time, money and efforts ([Spiegel 2012](#)).

This discussion cluster sees two major flaws in the entire issue of Haredi conscription. First, the Haredi world does not comprehend the true weight attributed to the issue of conscription in Israeli society. For the most part, it has not internalized the importance Israelis attach to their reluctance to serve (for an internal Haredi explanation, see [Cohen 2013](#)).¹⁷ The Haredi misunderstanding of the situation therefore prevents them from addressing the issues appropriately and their responses only generate hostility in Israeli society. Forcing them to enlist will not solve this point.

Second, most Israelis do not understand the price in both actual funds and social implications that will have to be paid if Haredi conscription is indeed implemented. Haredi soldiers are costly; for example, the IDF must pay any soldier a higher salary if s/he is married and more per child. Drafting of Haredi soldiers, who are usually older and already married if not fathers, costs approximately NIS 5,500 more than a “regular” soldier ([Peretz 2013](#)). In addition, Haredi food – a more stringent level of kashrut – is more expensive. If the Haredi soldier is not married, but estranged from his family due to conscription, or otherwise, he is also entitled to a higher salary as a “lone soldier” in order to allow him to rent an apartment, furnish and maintain it.¹⁸ While this seems a small amount, when considering the wish to conscript large numbers of Haredi soldiers this small amount accumulates to significant sums.

The IDF would prefer to conscript younger soldiers, who are hopefully yet unmarried and without children, due to budgetary reasons. However, these soldiers still cost the Israeli taxpayer more than “regular” soldiers ([Amit 2017](#)).

Furthermore, these are not motivated soldiers who truly wish to serve. Can they be counted on in the battlefield? Will they obey orders? What will happen if their rabbis give orders that contradict orders given by the IDF? In this respect, does it pay to conscript such potentially unreliable soldiers?

The social price is more complicated. Haredi soldiers require their own units where more stringent levels of kashrut are upheld, no women may serve, prayers and Torah study are mandatory, and in general Haredi lifestyle is upheld. The IDF goes to great lengths to cater to their specific needs after years of complaints ([Ettinger 2007](#); [Segev 2001](#)). In other words, the more fundamental question concerns the effect Haredim will have on the IDF itself if they begin to enlist in large numbers. This effect is usually exemplified by two topics: the religization of the military, namely a rise of religious visibility in the ranks; and the exclusion of women from the ranks due to pressure from the Haredi camp ([Spiegel 2007](#)). Since Haredi lifestyle requires strict separation of the sexes, women do not serve in any capacity in Haredi units and are not allowed near Haredi units. Most of the IDF's instructors are women (including physical fitness instructors, tank and mortar instructors, shooting instructors and so on), as are most social needs NCOs (*Mashakit Tash*). This situation will require the IDF to change its internal organization and train men to be instructors rather than directing them to combat posts, consequently marginalizing women in the ranks even more.

Some secular publicists have outlined the implications of Haredi conscription plainly. For example, “The military will need to change its entire personality in order to allow them [Haredim] to serve in accordance to their faith, and is that what the military needs? This is what you want [the conscription of Haredim]? If it happens, you’ll yell ‘religization’ until you’re blue, right? So stop this nonsense of ‘equality of the burden!’” ([Niv 2017](#)).

This statement echoes how some Haredi writers view conscription. In a recent op-ed, a Haredi publicist stated plainly that if Haredim will be conscripted:

This is in essence a situation where everyone loses. [...] if the Haredim will enlist *en masse* (joining the Religious-Zionists), [...] the peoples’ army will undergo a substantial change and religiazation, and to this secular [Israelis] cannot agree. And if the reality were the opposite, and Haredim who enlist

will undergo a process of secularization and assimilation in the Israeli environment – to this Haredi leadership cannot agree. [Cohen 2012¹⁹](#)
([Cohen 2012](#))

In short, Haredim cannot become part of the IDF as it will cause deep social changes, both in Israeli society and in the Haredi world. It is simply not worth it. Clearly, neither side can compromise and therefore this step will cause only friction. Better to maintain the status quo where Haredim do not enlist and leave it at that.

In this context, the Haredim seem to be counting on Israeli feminism to help their cause. For example, an enthusiastic article on the popular Haredi news site *Behadrei Haredim* reported that 20 senior women officers oppose the conscription of Haredi men since such a step will hinder the absorption of women in the ranks, and asked hopefully: “will salvation come from the women officers?” ([Roth 2012a](#)). Since women's rights groups have been vocally advocating better gender integration in the ranks, it seems that the Haredi position is to hope that liberal values concerning women will overcome the wish to conscript Haredim.

In general, the Haredi tactic is to use non-Haredi sources to bolster their position that mass conscription is a mistake. Whether quoting various experts and public figures saying that the military does not really need Haredim ([Roth 2012b](#); [Cohen 2012](#)); that the laws formulated to force conscription will boomerang ([Ben Yishai 2014](#));²⁰ or secular public figures recognizing that religious studies are important and trump service ([Man 2017](#)). Some secular writers agree that the pressure to conscript Haredim will boomerang, but in the opposite direction: it will bring about the abolishment of conscription in general and the end of the IDF as a people's army ([Levy 2012](#)).

Interestingly, while there are secular writers who advocated against Haredi conscription ([Spiegel 2012](#)), not all Haredi writers agree with these opinions. In a very interesting op-ed in 2014, David Rosental, a Haredi publicist and media persona, attacked Haredi political leadership for failing to understand that if they truly wish to manage the issue of conscription, they must compromise. Forcing the other side to agree to something will backfire and the correct way to address the issue is to strive to reach a consensus ([Rosental 2014](#)).

This discussion cluster is the least developed; mainly due to the fact that the other two discussion clusters are so deeply entrenched in public discourse. The idea that equality must be maintained, and that equality means conscription,

prevents this third cluster from gaining popularity and being heard.

Conclusion: In the End It's about the Boundaries of the Collective

Where can the discussion go from here and is there hope for an actual conversation rather than parallel monologues?

It seems that Israeli society is at a point where it is unable, as a collective, to listen. This is not just the case concerning issue of Haredi conscription, but also regarding other social agendas. While as individuals, Israelis are open to dialogue, and when in the same room with minority members, majority members are able to listen and conduct a conversation, as a collective they are not.²¹ Since each side is entrenched in their own narrative and unable to listen, the possibility of an in-depth discussion seems far off. It may be that there will never be a true discussion. Rather, changes will come about through top-down policy-making; which is always problematic in such volatile cases.

Possibility for change might arise by a move toward parallel structural change within the IDF, which will be accompanied with many social implications. In the past decade, Israeli reservists have been successful in changing the way lawmakers and the military view the reserves. Instead of discussing reserve duty in terms of equality, the debate has changed tracks and now revolves around the idea of fairness. It may be that if Israeli society is willing to view conscription along the same lines, the discussion vis-à-vis the issue of Haredi conscription could change as well. If Israelis will be willing to consider the option of compensation for military service as a way of leveling the playing field, and accepting that the Haredi minority cannot serve, there could be an opportunity for discussion. Since this shift in narrative has already happened in other issues, it is not unlikely that the Haredi topic will follow suit. This might mean a form of privatization of military service.

However, such a change will threaten the current social axiom of the IDF as a people's army, where all parts of society serve and come into contact, as some warn ([Levy 2012](#)). Israeli society is convinced that military service enables Israelis from all walks of life to meet on common ground. Military service is supposed to create a collective identity and enable Israelis to feel a connection to each other ([Rosman 2016](#)). Should Israeli society at large give up the idea of Haredi conscription, it is essentially redrawing collective boundaries so that it officially excludes the Haredi sector. While in practice, Haredim are removed from most of Israeli society, officially, they are most certainly considered part of

the collective. Giving in and issuing a comprehensive exemption while conscription for the rest of the Jewish population still stands, will be officially stating that Haredim are not part of “us” but rather complete outsiders; “them.” Indeed, some writers feel that the lack of military service has already marginalized Haredim ([Cohen 2008](#)).

This idea needs to be introduced into the discussion and examined in depth. When Israeli society wishes Haredim to enlist, it is also inviting them to be a part of the collective. To serve with other Israelis, and, later on, to work and study alongside them. This is not the case, for example, when discussing Palestinian Israeli citizens. There is no question that this group is exempt from conscription and there is no public debate regarding the fact that this group of citizens does not serve. While there is certainly a need for discussion of this difference, the fact remains that when Israelis want Haredim to enlist, what they are really saying is: you must join the collective more actively. We want you to be fully Israeli; part of the ingroup of “us.” Should Israelis accept that Haredim should be exempt, this will mean that the collective no longer sees them as equal members but rather as an outgroup; another social minority, separate from the majority in every way. The revision of the axiom regarding conscription will therefore have serious implications for all Israeli citizens, Haredi and non-Haredi alike. Haredim, as well as non-Haredim should consider this option seriously.

Even if Haredim wish to maintain their unique and separate identity, they too agree that they are part of a Jewish (if not Israeli) collective. Their statements regarding Torah study protecting the state as much as military service, if not more so, indicate they still feel a collective responsibility. In recent years, more young Haredim feel a connection to the state than was the case in the past (see the news item prepared by the Haredi correspondent of Kan, Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, and [Zilbershlag 2017](#)). They might not be willing to sever this connection quite so casually.

Presently, these discussion clusters continue to shape the debate regarding conscription of Haredim. It seems evident that a reassessment of the issue of Haredi conscription is in order. All the parties involved must first realize what exactly it is that they are debating, what issues are truly on the table and what end result is desired by each of the actors. Without a dialogue, it seems as though we shall continue to hear shouts and accusations with no common conversation taking place, and in the end might find the collective social tower has turned into a pile of rubble.

Notes

1. [I thank Nahshon Perez for his insightful comments and Niva Aharoni for her research assistance.](#)
2. [For an overview of Haredi soldiers in the IDF during Israel's Independence War](#), see [Brown 2017](#); [Cohen 1994](#); [Ehrenvald 2017](#); [Frankel 1994](#).
3. [Most of the contemporary Haredi community accepts the state of Israel as a given and does not attempt to undermine it](#) ([Brown 2017](#)). The vast majority of Haredim speak Hebrew, vote, and Haredi leaders are elected to office and take part in public life in Israel.
4. [Haredi leadership alludes to this connection and equates military service in the IDF with the attempt to convert Cantonists](#). For example, see: [Shkedi 2013](#), particularly the quote alluding to the connection between conscription in Israel and Russia; [Yaakovi 2017](#), especially the photos chosen to accompany the article covering an anti-conscription demonstration. These feature various dictators, who supposedly tried to coerce Jews to serve in militaries and forfeit their faith. This association is somewhat inaccurate. See: [Zalkin 2006](#).
5. [All conscripts were Jewish, so this could not be a basis for exemption.](#)
6. [For example, Ilan \(2000\), Meir \(2002\), Yoaz \(2006\), Ettinger \(2007\), Ettinger \(2015\), and Cohen \(2017\).](#) This, of course, is a matter of opinion and framing. Different types of media, reporters and op-ed writers take a multitude of stands, depending on their position vis-à-vis the issues at hand.
7. [Although even less scholarly material has been written on these programs, such as SHAHAR Kahol.](#)
8. [See, for example, Jobani and Perez \(2014\)](#) who present the Haredi position, yet not quoting Haredi writers. This is not due to neglect on the part of the authors, but because finding actual halakhic writings on this topic by Haredi rabbinic authorities is impossible.
9. [Although it seems in reality this is a more complex topic, as we shall see later.](#)
10. [For a comprehensive overview of Haredi men in the workforce](#), see [Bilzovsky \(2010\)](#).
11. [Although Israel has no constitution, it has a series of Basic Laws. These serve as a basis for future constitution. The Tal Law was perceived as opposing the Basic Law: Human Dignity.](#)
12. [Not only does the Haredi narrative see the situation as fair, but some feel](#)

- [that it is only due to Haredi Torah study that the state exists. See JDN \(2016\).](#)
13. [For the Haredi community, this was reminiscent of the aforementioned Cantonist period.](#)
 14. [The committee did not specify the exact quota numbers. These would be decided by the government every year.](#)
 15. [For example, women soldiers who serve as field guides \(*madrikhat bet sefer sadeh*\) do so together with civilian national service volunteers. They have different living conditions and are subject to different rules but preform the same job.](#)
 16. [Literally, “They are trying to lay us down,” meaning “to defeat us.”](#)
 17. [Another interesting example are the talkbacks by Haredim to an item reporting the remarks of a prominent journalist who said that “it is not possible that \[military\] funerals do not leave from Bnei Brak \[a predominantly Haredi town\]. They should leave from Bnei Brak as well. Not just from Tel Aviv and Ma’alot.” Haredi responses to this item focus on the fact that “if all of Israel would observe Shabbat properly, they would be redeemed immediately and there would be no more wars and no enemies and no death in the world.” See Gronich \(2014, 2015\).](#)
 18. [As are all soldiers who have no immediate family in Israel, termed “lone soldiers.”](#)
 19. [For other examples of this same idea, see Arnon \(2014\).](#)
 20. [This op-ed appeared in a national paper \(*ynet*\) and reprinted in Haredi media.](#)
 21. [For example, the discussion regarding the demand that Palestinian Israelis sing the national anthem or celebrate Israeli Independence Day is a case in point.](#)

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4 Haredi Education in Israel

Policies and Practices

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Introduction

The Haredi education system separates boys and girls from the age of three years old. Haredi kindergartens for boys are typically called *Heder*. Primary Haredi schools include eight grades. Primary schools for boys are typically called *Talmud Torah*. Boys continue their learning in small yeshivas (*Yeshivah Ketanah*, grades 9-11) and then in big yeshivas (*Yeshivah Gedolah*) until they get married. Within the yeshivas, boys focus on religious studies. Girls continue their learning in high schools that are usually called seminars. These schools teach secular subjects and some of them provide options for continuing professional studies for young women aged 18–20.

The core value that organizes the Haredi education system is the study of religious texts at boys and teenagers' educational institutions ([Hakak and Rapoport 2012](#); [Spiegel 2011](#)). The boys are expected to join the “society of scholars (*Hevrat Halomdim*)”, in which the ideal for married men is to become religious scholars, devoting their lives to religious studies in educational institutions designated for married males (*Kollel*) ([Friedman 1991](#); [Hakak and Rapoport 2012](#); [Schiffman and Finkelman 2014](#)). Girls are encouraged to combine secular and religious studies so that they would be able to provide for their families when they grow up, thus enabling their future husbands to devote

their time to Torah study ([Almog and Perry-Hazan 2011](#)).

Although the Haredi formal education network for girls – *Beit Yaakov* – began developing in the early 20th century, the *Society of Learners* social model emerged only in the 1950s, after the establishment of the State of Israel. Before the 1950s, only excellent religious scholars devoted their lives to religious studies and did not work for their living. The welfare state and the public funds that were allocated to the Haredi private education system enabled the Haredi community to rely on young women to support their families. This model is an implementation of a religious *midrash* about a partnership between Issachar, who studies Torah, and Zebulon, who financially supports him. The spiritual reward of Issachar for studying Torah is equally divided between Zebulon and him.

A total of 298,772 students study in Israeli Haredi schools, out of which 24% of the students study in the Jewish sector of public education and 30% of the students study in the Jewish sector of public primary education ([Malach, Hoshen, and Cahaner 2017](#)). Yet, there are few empirical studies on these schools, and we know relatively little about their curricula and pedagogies. This chapter attempts to provide an updated review of the main themes that may contribute to understanding the structure and practices of Haredi schools in Israel as well as mapping the gaps in the literature on this subject. The [first section](#) describes Haredi schools' legal status and regulations; the [second section](#) focuses on the curricula taught in Haredi schools; the [third section](#) outlines Haredi schools' admission policies and practices; and the [last section](#) provides concluding remarks.

Regulatory Framework

The Israeli Compulsory Schooling Act issued in 1949 differentiates between “official,” i.e, public schools, that are operated by the State or the municipalities, and “recognized,” “unofficial,” and “exempt” schools, run by private organizations. The legal status of Haredi schools and the school network operating them determine their funding and their obligation to teach a core curriculum.

1. Haredi Official Schools

Haredi official schools are subjected to the National Education Law (1953). They are fully funded by the State and are required to teach a full

core curriculum. There are two kinds of Haredi official schools.

- a. Schools that belong to the Habad and Sanz communities, which are managed within the National-Religious stream of official schools.
- b. Schools that belong to a new stream of National Haredi official schools. This stream was established in 2013 when there were no Haredi parties in the governing coalition. It was not anchored by law and the schools that chose to become affiliated signed contracts with the Israeli Ministry of Education ([Katzir and Perry-Hazan 2019](#)).

2. Haredi-Recognized Unofficial Schools

Haredi-recognized unofficial schools include two sub-groups:

- a. Primary schools that belong to the two largest networks of Haredi recognized unofficial schools, namely the “Independent Education School Association” of the Yahadut Hatorah party and the “Wellspring of Torah Education School Association” of the Shas party. These schools are not owned by the State but are fully funded by the State due to an old political agreement (Budget Foundations Act 1985, Article 3A). They are obliged to implement a full core curriculum ([Israeli Ministry of Education 2011](#)). The networks manage various types of schools under various names, which target different populations. For example, the Haredi girls and teenagers' *Beit Yaakov* network is managed by the Independent Education School Association.
- b. Haredi recognized unofficial primary schools that belong to other school networks. These schools receive 75% of the level of funding provided to public official schools ([National Education Regulations \[Recognized Institutions\] 1953](#)) and they are required to implement 75% of the State's core curriculum ([Israeli Ministry of Education 2011](#)).

3. Haredi-Exempt Schools

Haredi-exempt schools also include two sub-groups:

- a. Primary exempt schools receive 55% of the level of funding provided to public official schools (Compulsory Schooling Act 1949, Article 10A). These schools are required to implement 55% of the State's core

curriculum ([Israeli Ministry of Education 2011](#)).

- b. Secondary exempt schools are small yeshivas. These yeshivas receive 60% of the level of funding provided to high schools and they are fully exempted from teaching secular curricula according to the Unique Cultural Educational Institutions Act (2008). This act provided legal imprimatur to the exclusive focus on religious studies in the small yeshivas. In 2014, the Israeli Supreme Court published a ruling regarding the constitutionality of this act ([Rubinstein v. Israeli Ministry of Education 2014](#)). Seven of the nine judges refused to nullify the act, and most of them used socio-political arguments, which relied on their reluctance to intervene in a legislative issue that is highly sensitive politically and culturally, or on the anticipated ineffectiveness of the ruling.

[Table 4.1](#) summarizes the regulatory framework of Haredi schools.

[Table 4.1](#) [Regulatory Framework of Haredi Schools](#)

| | <i>Haredi official schools (Habad, Sanz, and National Haredi)</i> | <i>Haredi recognized unofficial schools</i> | | <i>Haredi- exempt schools (grades 1-</i> |
|----------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Ownership | Israeli Ministry of Education | The <i>Independent Education</i> ; The <i>Wellspring of Torah Education</i> | Various school associations | Various school associa |
| State funding | 100% | 100% | 75% | 55% |
| Core curriculum | 100% | 100% | 75% | 55% |

Haredi Schools' Curricula: What We Do and Do Not Know

Boys' Primary Schools

Since 1999, there is a continuing legal and political discourse regarding the teaching of secular studies in Haredi boys' schools ([Perry-Hazan 2015a](#)). This discourse resulted in regulations requiring Haredi primary schools to teach a core curriculum ([Israeli Ministry of Education 2003; 2011](#)). However, there were no systematic efforts to implement these regulations ([Perry-Hazan 2015a](#)). In addition, most Haredi schools do not administrate national and international standardized testing ([National Authority for Measurement and Assessment in Education 2016](#)). Thus, there is no official data on the scope and quality of secular studies in boys' Haredi schools and on the impact of the regulations on teaching and learning processes.

A study conducted in Jerusalem indicated that Haredi boys' primary schools usually teach one or two hours of secular studies at the end of the day ([Spiegel 2011](#)). This research also showed that the secular studies include mostly Hebrew and math and that these subjects are taught by unqualified teachers. In grades 7–8, while the students prepare for the small yeshivas, there are less secular studies than in lower grades. The research also found that there is no substantial difference between recognized and exempt schools with regard to the scope of secular studies.

A recent study explored the new reform of the National Haredi Education, which enabled Haredi schools to sign agreements that change their status from private recognized unofficial schools to public official schools ([Katzir and Perry-Hazan 2019](#)). Schools that chose to join the reform held a relatively positive attitude toward secular studies. The parents who sent their children to these schools demanded secular studies, with the schools teaching most of the required subjects according to the State's core curriculum prior to joining the National Haredi Education. Prominent exemptions were English and physical education.

Another recent study explored language education policy in Habad schools, which are official public schools as well ([Tannenbaum and Cohen 2018](#)). Habad's attitudes toward English are unique in the Haredi community since Habad members conduct outreach work aimed at increasing the number of religious Jews in the world. The study showed that Habad schools implement an adjusted English curriculum, integrating content, process, and product in

compatibility with the special needs of the community. It also found that the State's English curriculum is implemented only partially, and that community members and educators view the superiority of the community's values over the State's curriculum and agenda as almost axiomatic.

These studies indicate that there are various educational preferences in the Haredi community. [Barak-Corren \(2021\)](#) explored the scope of these preferences regarding the secular curriculum taught in Haredi primary schools. In her comprehensive research, which was based on qualitative and experimental methods, Haredi participants were randomly allocated to one of three experimental conditions: (1) "Control framing," which framed the State's core curriculum as a mandatory requirement with the same heavy-handed language that the Israeli Ministry of Education used in its official publications; (2) "Identity affirmation framing," which recognized that Haredi schools enjoy substantial educational autonomy, emphasized that the scope of the intervention as limited, indicated that the curriculum is additive to the schools' religious studies program, and noted that it is adapted to the students. (3) "Extra-curricular model," which provided the option to teach the core curriculum after regular hours. The results differentiated between three groups of Haredi affiliations: Open, mainstream, and conservative. They showed that 100% percent of the open group, 62% of the mainstream group, and 17% of the conservative group supported teaching the State's core curriculum in the control framing. Identity affirming frame boosted the support of conservative Haredim and Haredi, the group that least supported the curriculum, from 17% to 36%. Eighty percent of the open group, 32% of the mainstream group, and 41% of the conservative supported teaching the State's core curriculum in after-school programs.

In another experiment, Barak-Corren explored the participants' support of adding two hours to the English core curriculum. The data showed that 83% of the open group, 56% of the mainstream group, and 10% of the conservative group supported the extended English curriculum in the control framing, and 95% of the open group, 54% of the mainstream group, and 30% of the conservative supported the extended English curriculum in identity affirmation framing. This revolutionary study revealed that there are various approaches toward secular studies even among mainstream and conservative Haredi groups. It also showed that framing policies, decisions, and compromises in ways that signal respect and appreciation of threatened values could go a long way in mitigating conflicts of values and norms in Haredi education, particularly among those who are most vulnerable to experience identity threats.

There is a long way to go until Haredi primary schools will reflect the variety of educational preferences in the Haredi community and provide more options for parents who want their boys to learn more secular subjects. The variety of educational preferences in the Haredi community requires Haredi schools to explore ways to integrate more secular studies. They also require the state to establish more Haredi schools that teach high-quality secular studies. The National Haredi Education stream is still small and includes around 16 boys' schools ([Katzir and Perry-Hazan 2019](#)).

Boys' Secondary Schools

The vast majority of Haredi boys study in small yeshivas, which teach only religious texts ([Hakak 2012](#); [Spiegel 2011](#)). The religious curricula in the small yeshivas focus on analyzing the Talmud and its interpretations, rather than on discussing religious contemplations and ideas ([Tikochinsky 2006](#)). Tikochinsky argued in this regard that the small yeshivas' learning processes fit exceptionally excellent students.

Small yeshivas are usually boarding schools, and their daily learning schedule lasts until the late hours of the evening ([Hakak 2012](#); [Spiegel 2011](#)). [Hakak's \(2012\)](#) ethnographic research in a Haredi Lithuanian small yeshiva provides a nuanced view into the dynamic of the yeshiva world – the tension between equality and excellence, the relationship between the earth and the spiritual world, the efforts to preserve the existing social order, and students' practices of resistance and subversion.

There are only a few Haredi high school yeshivas which teach secular studies. A study published more than ten years ago examined the Haredi fierce resistance to these yeshivas ([Lupo 2007](#)). A recent study conducted by [Gonen, Cohen, and Hayun \(2018\)](#) differentiated between Haredi high school yeshivas that teach only vocational studies and usually serve boys who drop out of Haredi schools, and Haredi high school yeshivas that teach high-quality secular studies and serve “mainstream” Haredi families who want their sons to acquire higher education. Gonen, Cohen, and Hayun focused on the second type of Haredi high school yeshivas, which were established in recent years by Haredi educational activists. They argued that the data on the number of students who apply to such yeshivas indicate a substantial growth, and that some of the boys' fathers study in *Kollels*. The study also reported on a survey indicating that 17% of Haredi parents want their children to study in Haredi high school yeshivas. Many of these parents do

not perceive the high school yeshivas as a mere solution for boys who do not fit the small yeshivas, but as an alternative that provides “full” Haredi education and should follow high standards of both religious and secular education. Gonen, Cohen, and Hayun indicated that the main barrier to the development of the Haredi high school yeshivas is the high tuition, which prevent many families from choosing this path.

Girls' Schools

During their elementary and secondary education, Haredi girls learn both religious and secular studies. As mentioned, the gender-based Haredi education policy is motivated by the social and economic interests of the Haredi community. The Haredi education for girls became an important component of the construction of the Society of Scholars. To enable women to pursue diverse employment options and support their husbands, various specialization tracks became available in Haredi girls' schools ([Almog and Perry-Hazan 2011](#)).

The religious studies in Haredi girls' schools do not include the Talmud which is the most significant content in the Haredi boys' schooling. According to the Talmudic tractate: “Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah [it is as if] he is teaching her frivolity (*tiflut*)” (Rabbi Eliezer, Sota 20a). Since the Talmud is the source of social power in the Haredi community, [El-Or \(1994\)](#) coined the term “educated and ignorant” to describe Haredi female education, depicting the following paradox: On one hand, the Haredi community considers the education of girls as a central mission, which requires dedication of much time and effort. But, on the other hand, it is presented on an ideological level as education for ignorance, promoting a desired prototype of an ignorant woman, whose main role is tending to her children and household.

More recent studies show that El-Or's arguments remain relevant. Brown explored the educational messages of Haredi rabbis and educators regarding Haredi women's work. She noted that intensive educational efforts are directed to deal with social conflicts created by the fact that men do the housework and “lose their authority” ([Brown 2012](#), 45, 87–88). These efforts are aimed to strengthen the principle that the woman is a means for the man to fulfill his superior spiritual purpose. In another study, [Brown \(2013\)](#) argued that Haredi girls' education clearly emphasizes that only boys study the “real” and “important” subjects and that girls are restricted to practical knowledge.

Research conducted among Haredi women enrolled in a social work program

at a Haredi college revealed similar findings regarding the conservative messages of Haredi girls' schools ([Baum et al. 2014](#)). This study showed that women are exposed to two messages: One, the traditional message, sounded by their high school teachers and the older and more conservative members of the community, is that they should not pursue higher education, lest their exposure to the outside world undermine their religious observance and the cohesion of the community. The other, sounded by some of the rabbis and more progressive voices, and especially by the families of the women who were interviewed, is that they should go on to study, but choose from a small number of approved courses, which, in the view of the rabbis, do not threaten Haredi values and are oriented toward enabling the women to acquire a clearly defined, paid occupation within a relatively short time.

In her book on the modernization processes that characterized Jewish-educated women in 19th-century East European Jewish society, [Parush \(2004\)](#) argued that the Haredi community in Israel learned lessons from these processes. The main tools to prevent educated Haredi women from becoming agents of social change, she argued, are the girls' schools, which employ strict mechanisms of socio-religious supervision. [Neriya Ben-Shahar \(2011\)](#), who explored women's images and representations in Haredi journals for women, showed that the mechanisms in schools are supported by communal educational tools. She found that Haredi journals for women made a "U turn to the traditional course," restricting women's actions in public and political spheres.

The aforementioned studies reveal some of the main characteristics of Haredi girls' education, but none of them focused on schools. Thus, we lack empirical studies that explore the current educational practices of Haredi girls' schools and map the similarities and variances in different schools.

Conflicts over Haredi Schools' Admission Policies

Scholars divide the Israeli Haredi community into various groups and sub-groups, typically comprising Sephardic, Lithuanians, Hassidic, Radicals, and National-Haredi Jews ([Caplan 2003](#); [Pfefer 2007](#)). The Sephardic group traces its ancestry to North African and Arab countries, while the other cluster of Haredi groups originated from European countries. Haredi education has been dominated by the Ashkenazic *Independent Education* school network since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 ([Feldman 2013](#)).

During the 1980s, the Sephardic Haredi community established its own school

network, in order to avoid the discriminatory practices of the Ashkenazi-dominated schools ([Feldman 2013](#); [Leon 2013](#); [2014](#)). However, many Sephardic Haredi parents prefer not to send their children to the Sephardic Haredi schools, which are perceived by these parents as less prestigious ([Leon 2013](#)). The schism between Sephardic (often called *Mizrahi*) Jews and Ashkenazic Jews characterizes Israeli non-Haredi society as well ([Feniger, Mcdossi, and Ayalon 2015](#); [Mizrachi, Goodman, and Feniger 2009](#); [Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013](#); [Yefet 2016](#)). Although this schism is much vaguer among non-Haredi Jews, it often leads the typically dark-complexioned Sephardic non-Haredi Jews to “act white” and mimic Ashkenazic habits ([Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013](#); [Shoshana 2016](#)).

As mentioned, most of the Haredi schools are affiliated with private associations and hold a legal status of recognized unofficial or exempt schools. Both recognized unofficial and exempt Haredi schools are authorized to admit only students affiliated with the Haredi community. Nonetheless, they are forbidden to discriminate against students based on ethnic origin ([Prohibition on Discrimination in Products, Services, and Entrance to Entertainment and Public Places Act 2000](#); [Student's Rights Act 2000](#)).

Over the last decade, the issue of discriminatory admission policies to Haredi schools has been extensively discussed in secular courts ([Perry-Hazan 2015a](#)). The peak of the legal discourse was a case concerning a school in the city of Immanuel that segregated Ashkenazic and Sephardic girls ([Noar Kahalachah Association v. The Israeli Ministry of Education 2009](#); [Almog and Perry-Hazan 2013](#); [Karayanni 2016](#); [Shoshana 2014](#)). The Supreme Court ordered the “Independent Education” network which operated in the school to discontinue the ethnic segregation and required the Israeli Ministry of Education to supervise the ruling. A few months later, when the school maintained its segregating practices, this educational network and the Ashkenazi parents were found to be in contempt of court and the parents were incarcerated ([Noar Kahalachah Association v. The Israeli Ministry of Education 2010a](#); [2010b](#)).

When a new school year began, the Israeli Ministry of Education approved the request of a group of Ashkenazic parents to establish a new school that would not receive state funds ([Noar Kahalachah Association v. The Israeli Ministry of Education 2010c](#)). Consequently, the court closed the case, expressing the hope that the Ministry of Education's decision did not indicate an intention to achieve the “intolerable” goal of ethnic discrimination ([Noar Kahalachah Association v. The Israeli Ministry of Education 2010c](#)).

A recent study shows that the dominance of this case in the public discourse empowered a group of Haredi parents of discriminated-against children to introduce the language of rights within the Haredi community: They spread legal knowledge, facilitated access to lawyers and experts, and disseminated the resonance of cases in which Sephardic parents successfully challenged decisions of schools that had rejected their children ([Perry-Hazan and Perelshtain 2018](#)). This group of rights agents raised the rights consciousness of Haredi parents, supporting them in surmounting religious and instrumental barriers that hindered rights claims.

This research was conducted when there was a policy window of a government that did not depend on the Haredi parties. Within this policy window, the Israeli Ministry of Education decided to join the struggle against the discriminatory admission policies. More and more parents were encouraged to mobilize their rights as a result of a campaign that raised awareness, modified appeal procedures, and leveraged the success of previous appeals on discriminatory decisions. The current Israeli government coalition, which relies upon the participation of Haredi parties, does not seem to continue the struggle against the ethnic discrimination in Haredi schools.

A report of the [State Controller and Ombudsmen \(2017, 935–937\)](#) criticized the Israeli Ministry of Education for failing to formulate coherent and effective policies to enforce the legal prohibition on discrimination in Haredi schools, including policies targeting discrimination that occurs after students are admitted to these educational institutions. In a study that analyzed admission policies to religious Jewish schools in a comparative perspective, I argued that a prohibition on religious classifications in school admission policies carries a cultural cost for some religious parents, but it averts the inherent “slippery slope” that begins with religion and deteriorates to discriminative grounds ([Perry-Hazan 2019](#)).

Concluding Remarks

The literature reviewed above shows that there are new initiatives in Haredi Education – the National Haredi Education and new Haredi high school yeshivas. Yet, these initial changes do not correspond to the scope of the various social processes that have occurred in the Haredi community in recent years, manifesting themselves, inter alia, in greater participation in higher education, in the army, in non-Haredi political parties, and in the digital world ([Caplan and Stadler 2009](#); [Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#); [Hakak 2016](#); [Malach, Hoshen, and](#)

[Cahaner 2017](#); [Novis-Deutsch and Lifshitz 2016](#)). It could be that broader changes in Haredi education are occurring under the surface, but they are yet to be explored and analyzed.

Israeli legal scholars and political philosophers have engaged in fierce debates concerning the autonomy of Haredi education to shape its curricula ([Cohen-Eliya 2008](#); [Mautner, 2011](#); [Perry-Hazan 2013](#); [Stopler 2014](#)) and admission policies ([Karayanni 2016](#); [Mautner, 2014](#); [Perry-Hazan 2013](#); [Shmueli 2014](#)). In previous comparative studies on Haredi education, I argued that normative lenses, focusing on the content of the legal rules, cannot see the whole picture ([Perry-Hazan 2014](#); [2015b](#); [2019](#)). The process of translating laws into education policies that regulate Haredi communities should consider its implementation; it should inquire how values are embedded in policies and practices. The implication of this approach is that in certain cases, the state should shape education laws whose impact would produce the best outcomes, rather than education laws whose wording may reflect an adequate normative balance but present a poor prognosis for their implementation in Haredi schools. Shaping policies that can be implemented requires more rigorous research on various unexplored issues, including the educational practices of Haredi schools; processes of change in these schools; their management and administration; and their relationships with parents, the rabbinical establishment, municipalities, and the Israeli Ministry of Education. Such studies require scholars to overcome access barriers, enter the schools and collect data.

Some of the studies described in this chapter provide an empirical inquiry in certain locales ([Spiegel 2011](#)), specific Haredi streams ([Katzir and Perry-Hazan 2019](#); [Tannenbaum and Cohen 2018](#)), or particular schools ([Hakak 2012](#)). This chapter also referred to studies conducted in other contexts, such as Haredi higher education ([Baum et al. 2014](#)), and Haredi journals for women ([Neriya Ben-Shahar 2011](#)), in which their findings revealed some of the educational messages in Haredi girls' schools.

Notwithstanding their contributions to our knowledge, the broader picture is still vague. While there are various kinds of Haredi schools belonging to different Haredi streams and networks, we know relatively little about the pedagogical and organizational differences between these schools. We also do not know whether and how these schools were influenced by cultural changes in the Haredi community, or by the changing legal framework. The gap of knowledge on Haredi education relates not only to the lack of academic research, but also to the lack of official data regarding Haredi schools due to

their general reluctance to participate in national and international assessments.

A book published by the inspectors in the new Haredi district of the Ministry of Education includes several innovative initial efforts to explore some of these issues ([Barth 2018](#)). The studies presented in this volume provide a glance into the work of the district and the supervisors and to their relationships with municipalities. One way to develop the research on Haredi education may be working with Haredi districts to expand these studies. Collecting data from inspectors who work with Haredi schools may yield important insights that may assist in adapting different policies to different Haredi groups. Although such cooperation solves access barriers, it requires careful thought to the ethical issues in the research design, relating to the dependency of the research subjects and to the ability of the scholars to analyze findings critically.

Another aspect that deserves further research are extra-curricular activities for Haredi children. There is a growing phenomenon of Haredi children who apply for after-school English and math programs. Recently, influential rabbis published an official opinion prohibiting the participation in such programs ([Weisberg 2018](#)). It is important to reveal the scope of children's extra-curricular activities in the Haredi community, especially activities aiming to complement for the lack of secular studies in the schools, and to analyze the barriers that may hinder the application to such programs in different Haredi communities.

Be it as it may, the existing body of knowledge and documented developments and processes, as well as the scholarly lacunae that awaits rigorous and methodologically sophisticated studies, are crucial in any attempt to seriously address issues surrounding the study of required core subjects in Haredi primary and secondary educational institutions, an issue that has been revisited in the wake of forming Israel's 37th government toward the end of 2022.

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5 The Study of Haredi Space in Israel

Trends, Characteristics, Achievements, and Challenges

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Studying Haredi Space: A Note on Existing Sources of Information

At the beginning of the 21st century, Caplan published an article that provided an initial and partial survey of the state of scholarship devoted to Israeli Haredi society, focusing on several subjects including demography, geography, economics, politics, theology, and communications ([Caplan 2003](#), 223–278). In 2007 he published a bibliography that of some 580 items, the vast majority of which includes academic studies, organized according to topics and sub-topics ([Caplan 2007](#), 226–339). A decade later he noted that this bibliography was outdated due to the growth and development of research since then, and that it demanded considerable revisions so to reflect the current scholarly achievements ([Caplan 2017](#)). In the midst, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research published in 2015 a list of references running hundreds of studies, compiled by Shlomo Tikochinski.

Based upon these lists and further information, Caplan estimated over 1,000 scholarly articles and books on Haredi society, of which the great majority were published over the last three decades ([Caplan 2017](#)). A recently updated list close to 1,900 items ([Caplan and Becher 2022](#)).

These lists reveal trends in the study of Haredi society and point to a body of research on Haredi space, notwithstanding considerable scholarly lacunae and challenges relating to this topic. Since geography has inherent ties with other disciplines, it is noteworthy in this context that those who study Haredi space are situated in university departments of geography and urban planning, as well as departments such as sociology, public policy, political science, and law. Thus, the development of Haredi space and subsequently its study depends on and relates to fields of knowledge including demography, economy, and society, as well as various significant changes witnessed in Haredi society in recent decades. Indeed, certain satellite fields that intersect with geography have received scholarly attention, such as Haredi economics and patterns of transport, tourism, and leisure culture. To this effect, Caplan's aforementioned analysis is partial and invites a reassessment.

Other significant sources regarding the study of the development of Haredi space in Israel, Haredi centers of population, and socioeconomic and demographic trends exist, and these include quantitative data and statistical databases on Haredi society. They are created by government agencies such as the Central Bureau of Statistics, the National Insurance Institute, the National Economic Council in the Prime Minister's Office, Bank of Israel, the Knesset Research and Information Center, and the Ministries of Economy, Housing, and Transport. Finally, additional information is available in policy studies published by research institutes such as the Israel Democracy Institute, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies, and the Haredi Institute for Public Affairs.

Research into Haredi space encompasses, therefore, academic and applied studies. The academic research seeks to create knowledge, mappings, ideas, scenarios, and geographical and spatial models that analyze the current spatial situation, trends and developments over time, and possible projections for the future. It expresses a commitment to creating a link to urban studies and research into isolationist and enclosed communities around the world. Its products are intended for academic use, but they also serve the needs of applied and practical discourse on Haredi geography such as urban planning. The products of applied research, which encompass data, case studies, and recommendations, are made accessible to the State, municipal planning agencies, government ministries, planning offices, civil society organizations, and the business sector. These bodies take an interest with a view to planning the use of national space for the various populations that inhabit it.

The Study of Haredi Geography in Israel

Studying Israeli Haredi space as such is a relatively recent development. The development of this field may be divided into three main periods: 1980s–1990s; the end of 1990s through the first decade of the 21st century; and the second decade of this century.

The first generation of scholars who created models for studying Haredi space in Israel published most of its research during the 1980s and 1990s, whereas the studies of the second generation emerged mainly towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Overall, it seems as though the first generation wrote mainly from a position of tension and identity conflict with Haredi society, while the second generation write with a certain empathy for the needs and cultural sensitivities of this society.

The studies produced during the first period formed the foundations of geographical knowledge about Haredi space, and those behind them created the distribution models and geographical approaches for studying Haredi space ([Friedman 1991](#); [Gonen 1995](#); [Schnell 1988](#); [Shilhav 1993](#); [Shilhav and Friedman 1985](#)). These studies presented the stages of the diffusion of Haredi society over the years during which Haredi populations moved out of Bnei Brak and Jerusalem to peripheral areas both near and far, mainly due to the need for less expensive housing and greater living space for a growing population. This process entailed a migration to towns that became cities in the 1950s and to development towns in the periphery in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the creation of new Haredi cities in the West Bank and in border areas during the 1990s ([Gonen 1995](#); [Shilhav 1993](#)). These settlement models varied but they all reflected the need to create isolated spaces for Haredi communities, including separate Haredi neighborhoods within secular cities and separate cities for Haredi populations.

Menachem Friedman and Yosef Shilhav emphasized the characteristics of the Haredi community as an urban community that is simultaneously traditional, religious, and conservative. They discussed the social and cultural aspects of the encounter between urbanism and secularism on the one hand, and Haredi traditionalism on the other hand. They argue that Haredim largely tended to refrain from demanding the “right to a city [of their own]” and the right to “urban citizenship,”¹ due to the distinction between the instrumentalist components of modernity and its value-based components ([Shilhav and Friedman 1985](#)).

A significant model that was produced during this research period and developed further by Shilhav was the “complementary isolationism” model, which does not contribute to the general urban functional model, also due to the distinction that allows Haredim to maintain interactions with non-Haredim on an instrumental, mundane, and daily level, such as in banks, medicine, and government institutions, while preserving their values and cultural affiliations in synagogues and separate educational institutions, for example ([Shilhav and Friedman 1985](#); [Shilhav 1991](#)).

The second period of research began at the end of the 1990s and is characterized by the focus on the process of establishing the new Haredi cities, and their impact on Haredi space and on the balance of power with general Israeli space. This development is with particular reference to their geopolitical location beyond the Green Line ([Shilhav 1997](#); [1999](#); [2001](#)). Several additional studies that appeared during this period, mostly by Shlomo Hasson, are devoted to the spatial relationship between Haredim and secular Israelis, particularly in Jerusalem, and various future scenarios and their spatial consequences for these relationships ([Gonen and Hasson 1997](#); [Hasson 1996](#); [1999](#); [2001](#); [2002](#)).

Another type of study that emerged during this period was that of reports produced for Israeli government ministries, which sought to understand the housing needs of the Haredi public and to identify suitable solutions ([Canaan, Stern, and Uziel-Carmel 2006](#); [Degani and Degani 2000](#)). Related are studies such as Hadas Hanani's doctoral dissertation devoted to the characteristics of Haredi homes and their structure, and housing patterns in Haredi society ([Hanani 2008](#)).

The third period, during the second decade of the 21st century, is characterized by scholars focusing on the structure of Haredi space and the interactions between the various centers of Haredi population ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [Cahaner and Shilhav 2012a](#); [2012b](#)); the formation of Haredi cities as both West Bank settlements and suburban gated communities ([Cahaner and Shilhav 2013](#); [Cahaner 2016](#); [2017a](#)); the nuanced social fabric comprising various sub-communities within Haredi neighborhoods and mixed cities ([Fleishman and Gubman 2014](#); [Flint 2012](#); [2014](#); Flint, Alfasi, and Beneson 2010); the meanings of “double segregation” in new Haredi cities between Haredim and secular Israelis, and within Haredi society along internal ethnic lines of division ([Cahaner 2016](#); [2018](#)); the Haredi “concept of space” ([Cahaner 2018](#); [2020b](#)); and the need to develop the “seamlines” in mixed urban settings due to cultural, economic, and social changes in Haredi society and the need for intermediary

space for modern Haredi communities that seek shared public space with non-Haredi populations ([Cahaner 2017](#); [Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#)).

Another significant area that developed during this period is applied studies and policy papers that seek to provide guidelines for Haredi contemporary and future spatial needs. For example, a paper published for the Israeli Ministry of Housing in 2015 examined the projected housing needs of the Haredi public through 2035, offering a range of suitable solutions ([Israeli Ministry of Housing 2015](#); [2019](#)). Similarly, studies by the National Economic Council and the Bank of Israel, looking at Haredi spatial, social, and economic needs through 2040 ([Bank of Israel 2016](#); [Raz-Dror and Kost, 2017](#); [Regev and Gordon 2020](#)).

Noteworthy in this context is a study that analyzed the question of suitable residential spaces for Haredim, and the possible creation of entirely Haredi cities versus mixed secular and Haredi cities. The authors are highly critical of the development of Haredi “satellite cities” in recent decades, such as Beitar Illit and Modi'in Illit, and their main recommendation for future housing for Haredim is the use of heterogeneous “mosaic cities” in which the Haredi population can be found in both Haredi spaces and general Israeli spaces ([Sadan, Gonen, and Plesner 2011](#)). Relevant to this is a review of special spatial models for the Haredi population that reflect processes of change within Haredi society and the various needs and limitations of Israeli space ([Cahaner 2018](#)).

During the past decade, we evidence studies that deal with Haredi space from a legal perspective relating to the “common good” model. This model used in law for inter-communal spaces is applied to the analysis of the Haredi community. It is predicated on the existence of three main conditions: Social fitness of the communities, a shared concept of “good,” and questions of distributive justice and resource allocation. The model relates to how the state is required to weigh these considerations as part of its policy toward communities with different characteristics and in national urban planning ([Stern 2013](#); [2016](#); [2017](#); [2018](#)).

An additional set of ethnographic studies of religious Jewish urban space is being led by Meirav Aharon-Gutman. Her work with Moriel Ram describes how synagogues change their meaning in response to urban change processes, from synagogues that are based on ethnic identity in lower-middle socioeconomic neighborhoods, to urban strongholds that serve as initial footholds in the battle over the religious Jewish identity of neighborhoods that are undergoing change in mixed cities such as Acre. Ram and Aharon-Gutman show how urban processes change religious institutions and their content, resulting in urban

religiosity and not just religious urbanism ([Ram and Aharon-Gutman 2017](#)). Another study presents an ethnography of the Breslav Hasidic community in Safed. The authors develop the Hebrew concept of “worship of the Lord” in order to connect faith-based activity to spatial activity, and thus challenge classical concepts of center and periphery, and create new conceptualizations for them and reinvigorate them ([Shani and Aharon-Gutman 2015](#); [2017](#)).

Another historical-geographical ethnographic study is that of Yossi Katz on the Haredi community in Yavne'el, a village in the lower Galilee. Katz examines the process of sanctification of the village by the Breslav Hasidic community. His study sheds light on the activities of Rabbi Schick, the leader of this community, and the development of his community, and he claims that it was Schick's writings that attributed the place a degree of holiness, as part of his efforts since the mid-1980s to create there what he called a “Breslav city.” Katz highlights the parallels with the sanctification of 770 Eastern Parkway in New York by Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the late leader of Lubavitch Hasidim, and suggests that both cases are connected to messianic activism ([Katz 2016](#)).

Nissim Leon connects between ethnic trends in Haredi society and spatial aspects. Leon describes the process of creating distinct Mizrahi Haredi communities, such as those of the followers of Rabbi Ben-Zion Abba Shaul, as a solution to the “Haredi ethnic problem” and the ethnic marginality of Mizrahi groups relative to the Ashkenazi hegemony. He claims that while Mizrahi Haredim view Ashkenazi Haredim as having considerable authority, they do not seek to mix with them at the spatial-social level. The result is a Haredi community with sizable margins, which on the one hand affords a religious and ethnic identity to non-Haredi Mizrahi Jews, and on the other hand, gives Mizrahi Haredi identity a “non-alienating” home, or at least the potential for such one ([Leon 2016a](#); [2016b](#)).

Another ethnographic study located on the margins of research into Haredi space explores the reasons why kibbutz members who became newly Orthodox chose to continue living in their kibbutzim. The authors examined the various challenges and advantages that accompany this decision, and the question of whether this is a transitional or fixed form of residency, a springboard to fully Haredi space, or a return to the secular home ([Cahaner and Leon 2013](#); [2014](#)).

Given these studies, it seems as though Caplan's observation regarding the lack of ethnographies and historical ethnographies ought to be re-examined([Caplan 2017](#)). Indeed, we do not have even a single comprehensive ethnography of any Haredi group that compares with such studies that appeared

in the 1960s and 1970s on Hasidic courts in North America ([Kranzler 1961](#); [Poll 1962](#); [Rubin 1972](#)). Moreover, there is almost no geographical-historical-cultural study of the Hasidic townships that were founded during the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s within general cities, such as Vizhnitz in Haifa, Sanz in Netanya, Kalib in Rishon Letzion, or Krechnef in Rehovot ([Caplan, 2007](#); [2017](#)).

However, Cahaner's study of the Haredi community in Haifa between 1950 and 2004, which also examined the establishment of the Seret-Vizhnitz township in the city in 1954 ([Cahaner 2004](#); [2005](#); [2009a](#)), as well as her doctoral dissertation, which included a concise review of the spread of Haredi communities in Israel including Hasidic courts, with a focus on spatial aspects ([Cahaner 2009b](#)), does fill in parts of this lacuna. This is in addition to the aforementioned ethnographic studies of Aharon-Gutman, Katz, and others.

Spatial Data, Models, and Patterns of Haredi Population

The characteristics of spatial patterns relate to various developments regarding the relationships between Haredi society and non-Haredi Israeli society and its various sub-groups. Clearly, these relationships have undergone changes in recent decades (for example, [Caplan 2007](#); [Caplan and Stadler 2012](#); [Leon 2017](#); [Malach and Cahaner 2017](#); [Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#)).

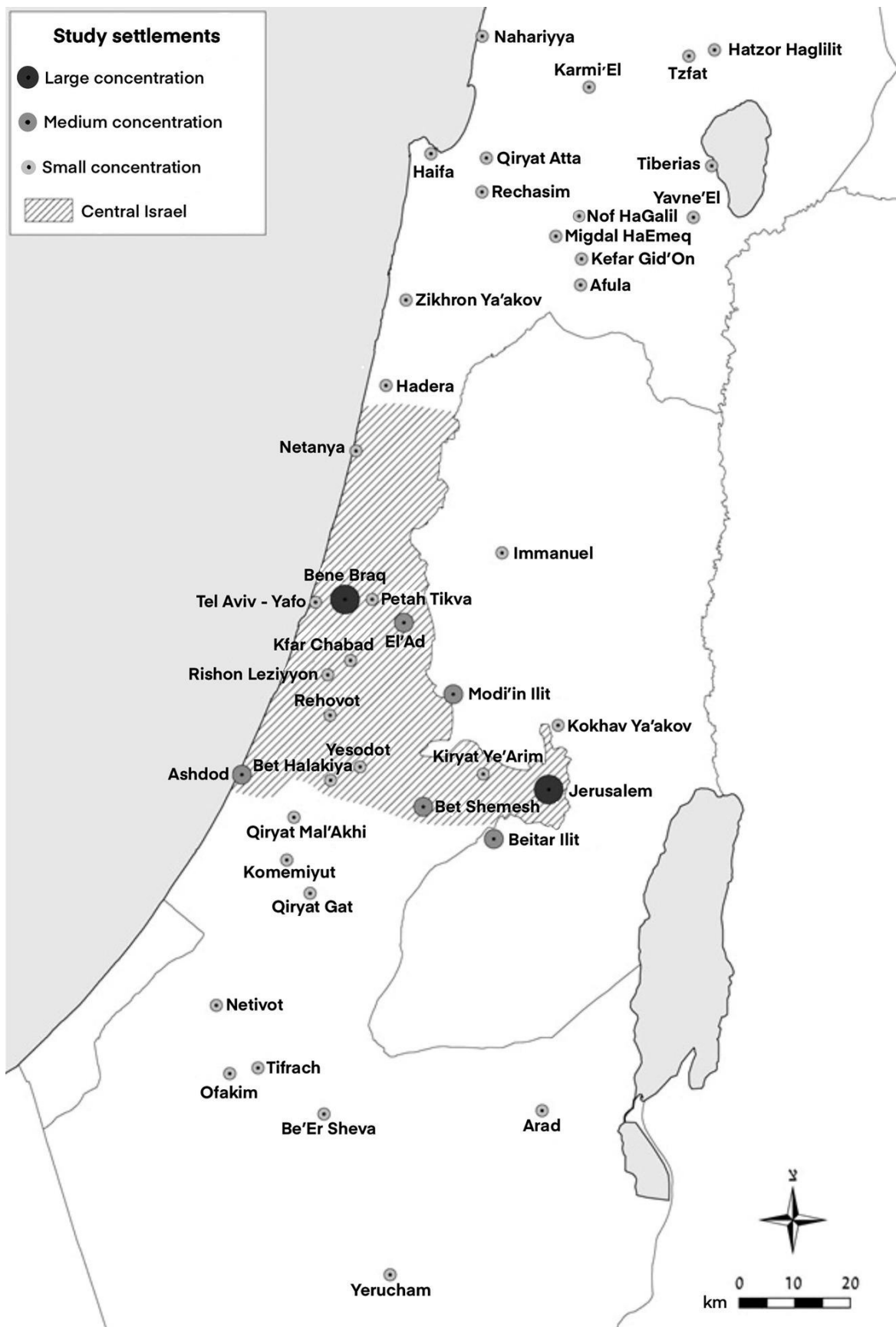
Haredi society is an isolationist religious society, generally preferring to live in closed spaces and enclaves, whether within mixed cities or in homogeneous Haredi cities. The goal of these enclaves is to maintain the conservative, inward-looking, communal, and religious lifestyle that characterizes this society. Yet, we cannot ignore the intrusion of modern, Western lifestyles and values into Haredi life. These external forces are beginning to blur the boundaries and guidelines that typified Haredi life for decades regarding interactions between status, pedigree, culture, and ethnicity, both vis-à-vis the “outside world” and within the isolationist community, and thus creating a new intermediate spatial model.

The basic model of Haredi population distribution is a spatial model founded on three main structures: the two veteran major cities of Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, Haredi populated centers in general cities, with various relative sizes of secular, religious, and Haredi populations, and homogeneous Haredi cities designed solely for Haredi populations ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [2017a](#); [Cahaner and Shilhav 2012a](#)). There is also a model for intermediate spaces which was created to refer to those members of the Haredi public seeking to be an active and

inseparable part of general residential areas within Israeli public space while also maintaining their distinct religious-communal-social identity ([Cahaner 2017; 2017a](#)).

[Figure 5.1](#) shows the distribution of the main Haredi population centers in Israel, whose spatial development is organized around the model elements described above. According to data from 2018:

- 80% of Haredim live in the center of Israel, in an area that includes the major cities of Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, the homogeneous suburban Haredi cities Modi'in Illit, Beitar Illit, Elad, and Ramat Beit Shemesh, and neighborhoods in large general cities such as Petach Tikva and Rehovot.
- 12% reside in the southern periphery including Ashdod, mainly in neighborhoods in development towns such as Netivot, Ofakim, Kiryat Gat, and Arad, and in rural communities such as Tifrah and Komemiyut.
- 8% live in the northern periphery, in towns and cities of various sizes: Large cities such as Haifa, Tzfat, and Tiberias; medium-sized cities such as Afula and Karmiel; development towns such as Migdal Ha'emek; and rural communities such as Kfar Gideon and Yavne'el ([Cahaner and Zicherman 2019; Regev and Gordon 2020](#)).

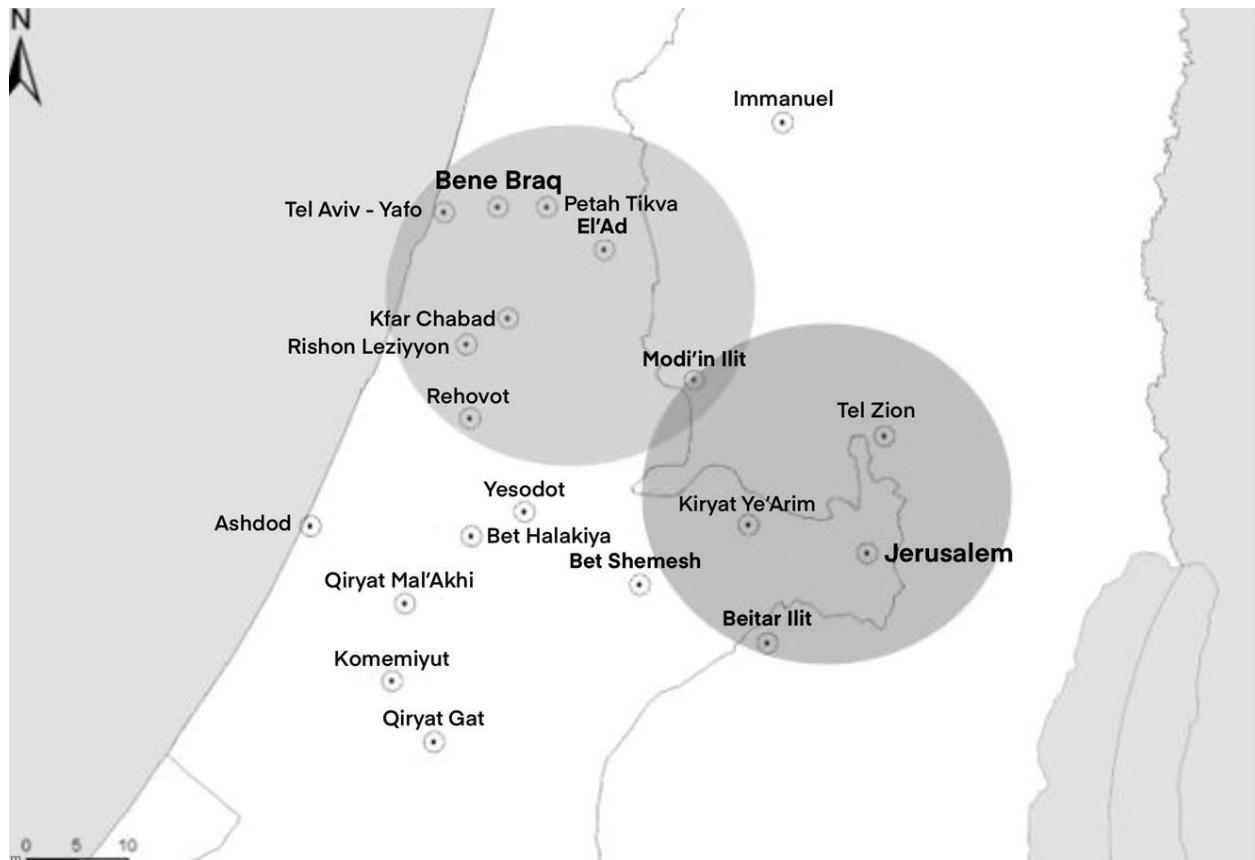


[Figure 5.1 Map of the Distribution of Haredi Space in Israel.](#)

A total of 250,000 Haredim reside in Jerusalem and 150,000 in Bnei Brak, the two cities that are home to the lion's share of the Haredi community and its various institutions, and thus are the drivers of processes that shape Haredi population distribution in Israel. Bnei Brak and Jerusalem are the main anchors and the central core of Haredi space in the country, and thus drive the educational, communal, consumerist, and employment-related developments within this society ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [Cahaner and Shilhav 2012a](#)).

The second structure, which is more complex, is that of Haredi neighborhoods in general cities of varying sizes. This can be broken down into Haredi neighborhoods in large general cities, which include concentrations of 15,000–30,000 Haredim of all types, and Haredi neighborhoods in small development towns in the periphery, with concentrations of 5,000–15,000 Haredim which are skewed toward Mizrahi Haredim. The model of Haredi neighborhoods in general cities includes sub-models differentiated by their character and processes of distribution: Communities created by the establishment of Hasidic townships that operate in a closed and less inviting communal structure; communities created around certain yeshivas; small communities created around charismatic rabbis; and communities populated by a range of Haredi groups ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [2018](#)).

The third structure, homogeneous Haredi cities, includes concentrations that number up to 60,000 people, including Elad, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Modi'in Illit, and Beitar Illit. These cities consist primarily of younger Haredi populations, have their own internal ethnic divisions, and operate as enclosed suburban communities fed by their links to the two major Haredi cities. They have their own almost “autarkic” economy which enabled justifying these communities' instrumentalist needs and institutionalized their cultural and social needs. This has been referred to in previous studies as “complementary spatial isolationism,” and creates a form of “auxiliary metropolises” alongside the metropolises of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as shown in [Figure 5.2](#) ([Cahaner 2009](#); [Cahaner and Shilhav 2012b](#); [Finkelstein 2022](#)).

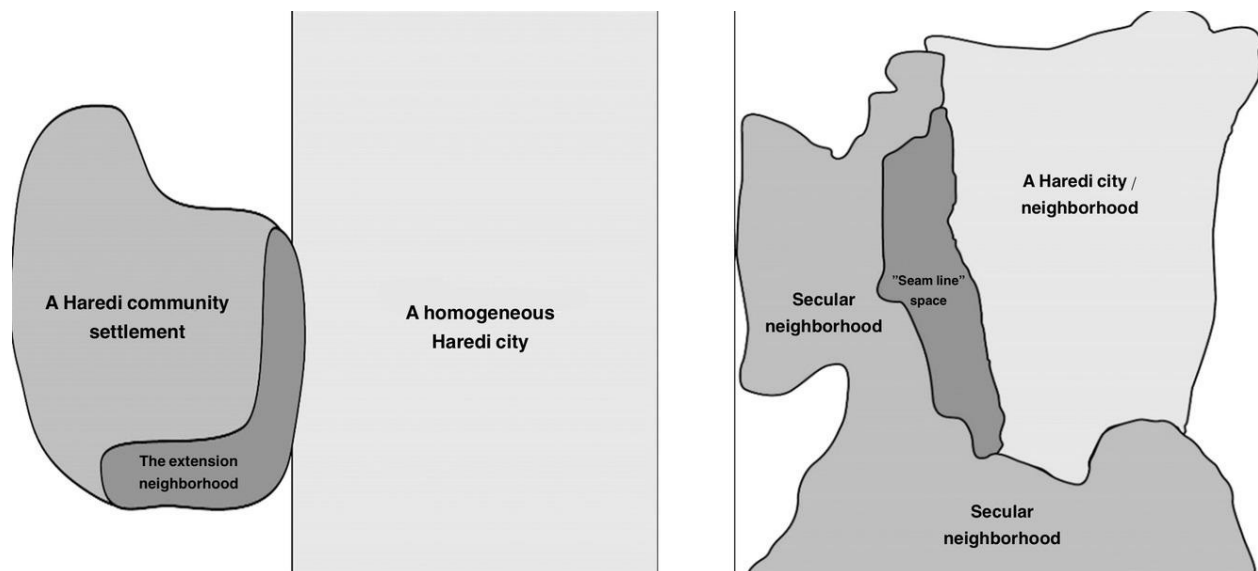


[*Figure 5.2*](#) [*Homogeneous Haredi Suburban Cities as Auxiliary Metropolises.*](#)

In addition, there are spatial models such as those of small rural communities that have been created for the most part by members of Poalei Agudat Israel and later developed around an educational institution that was established on site, or the model of communal and cooperative Haredi communities such as Or Haganuz ([Cahaner 2009b](#)).

As stated above, another significant model is that of “intermediate spaces,” which corresponds with another, more modern pattern of Haredi living, led by those who seek to inhabit the geographical and cultural “seamline” between Haredi space and secular space. Living together in residential areas in general cities has allowed the physical development of the modern Haredi community and facilitates a relationship between Haredi society and general society, a relationship that is far weaker in the homogeneous Haredi cities ([Cahaner 2017 2017a](#)). [Figure 5.3](#) shows the two types of spatial development of the “intermediate spaces,” the first being the “seamline” space between Haredi cities/neighborhoods and secular neighborhoods in a mixed city, and the second being the expansion neighborhood on the seamline between homogeneous

Haredi cities and Haredi communal settlements ([Cahaner 2017](#); [2017a](#)).



[Figure 5.3](#) [The Model for Intermediate Spaces between Haredi Space and General Space.](#)

Right to left:

“Seamline” space between a Haredi city/neighborhood and secular neighborhoods in a mixed city

Haredi city/neighborhood

“Seamline” space

Secular neighborhood

Expansion neighborhood on the “seamline” between a homogeneous Haredi city and a Haredi communal settlement

Homogeneous Haredi city

Haredi communal settlement

Expansion neighborhood

Studying Haredi space and its various models offers four levels on which these spatial structures can be analyzed. Within these levels, one can suggest a number of distinctions regarding the development of the spatial models of Haredi society in light of the economic, social, and cultural changes it is undergoing.

On the first level, the research emphasizes the transition from fully isolationist geography to multi-identity semi-isolationist geography, which takes into

account religio-social isolationist considerations and includes in its models' considerations of socioeconomic status-based isolationism and ethnic isolationism. This last element has played a prominent role in the spatial construction of Haredi society, yet it might also become less significant following the emergence of new patterns in Haredi identity which tend to a more liberal discourse regarding ethnic discrimination. This new geography of identities introduces new spatial structures into the model of Haredi isolationism, including a structured pattern of full non-isolationism as practiced by those groups within Haredi society seeking a more open relationship with general society ([Cahaner 2018](#)).

Haredi space is reorganizing itself not only vis-à-vis the surrounding society, but also from within. In terms of internal space, there has been a reorganization along social status and ethnic lines that reflects changes in time, identity, and place. This process led to a certain softening in relations with the external world and the spatial structure regarding it. Thus, the formative territories that were the cradle of ideas and both material and symbolic resources are taking on new spatial structures and models. Some of them are preserving their increasingly conservative and homogeneous identity and continuing to operate according to the same codes as in the past; others encompass new identities in their outlying and border areas; and others are changing and developing into “homes” for new evolving Haredi identities ([Cahaner 2017](#)).

On the second level, we identify an initial shift from a clear structure of “spearhead ideological communities,” which seek to separate themselves from the external world on an ethical-cultural-ethnic-ideological basis, to “planned communities,” organized around the goal of achieving a better quality and standard of living. Or, more precisely, to an intermediate place that combines the religious-ideational-isolationist identity with a more modern identity. The creation of intermediate spaces for modern Haredi identities reflects changes in lifestyles, standards of living, and, to a certain extent, in worldviews, as well as the wish to be part of Israeli public life. This interest results in neighborhoods that are constructed according to parameters of Western standards of living and lifestyles, based on an understanding that the space cannot be entirely isolated from general Israeli space. The distinction between living spaces within Haredi society is constructed less along ethnic divisions and more on socioeconomic-religious-communal similarities between potential neighborhoods in the enclaved space.

This spatial structure, while it may seem marginal in numerical terms at the

present time, should be considered as a possible future spatial model whose roots can already be found in the seamline spaces in certain cities and neighborhoods, including the greater significance of social and status elements than ethnic elements. In this context, there is a question of whether exposure to higher education, to significant and mixed employment environments, and to Western motifs and values will counterbalance and modify the entrenched, traditional, and ethnic ideas that are passed on via well-defined socialization processes in Haredi society, and thus enable the development of a space with a very different character ([Cahaner 2017a](#)).

On the third level, several studies examine the basic models of distribution of the Haredi population, the advantages and disadvantages of the spatial models used to analyze Haredi society, and how the spatial models that characterize modern Haredi populations compare with the traditional models of separate homogeneous Haredi cities and homogeneous Haredi neighborhoods within mixed cities. There is some disagreement concerning the character of the traditional models in terms of homogeneity: Some argue that it is correct to create closed homogeneous Haredi cities, which prevent friction with the general population and allow Haredi society to function as a majority within its own space, whereas others contend that “mosaic cities” are the future, in which Haredi neighborhoods are created within the general population in a way that allows Haredim to maintain communal residential areas but without creating closed and isolated enclaves. The question remains whether these spatial models can address not only the needs of the different population types within Haredi society, but also resolve tensions in the spatial relationships with the general population ([Cahaner 2018](#); [Israeli Ministry of Housing 2015](#); [Sadan, Gonen, and Plesner 2011](#)).

The fourth level concentrates on the analysis of the location of Haredi communities relative to the center and the margins of Israeli space, in both the central region of the country and the periphery, with adaptations to religious, ethnic, and status needs that characterize the different Haredi identities: isolationist conservative, integrationist modern, and ethnic ([Cahaner 2018](#); [Leon 2016a](#)). The concept of “center-periphery” exists on three different strata: Within urban spaces between weaker neighborhoods on the margins and stronger neighborhoods in the center; in terms of the location of the community within the regional space, between socio-economically weaker and stronger settlements within the same region; and on a national level, in terms of where Haredi communities should be categorized according to the new spatial models they

include in the central region of the country or the outlying periphery, and within the economic-social-cultural core of general society or of Haredi society ([Cahaner 2018](#)).

Research indicates that for the models that contain the conservative isolationist identity and the modern integrationist identity, location within a “strong” settlement, mostly in the central region but also in the geographic periphery, is the correct spatial solution. The homogeneous community model of a neighborhood within a central city benefits from a space that accepts its Haredi identity in economic and demographic terms, albeit typically not without a struggle. As for the “seamline model,” the core Israeli cities can facilitate significant relations in the social, economic, and cultural contexts with Israeli public space. For the marginal groups in Haredi society, the newly Orthodox and the Mizrahi Haredim, it appears as though socioeconomically weak settlements in the geographic periphery might weaken social mobility and reinforce their marginality, but they also facilitate the creation of dedicated communities in which there is a sense of home and a lack of alienation.

On a national scale, we find that homogeneous Haredi cities can seemingly be located anywhere, center or periphery, as long as they are accessible to the core major Haredi communities and are able to create a critical mass of residents and the necessary cultural and social infrastructure. The main idea indicates the choice between a place in the community (territorial) and a place for the community (non-territorial) ([Cahaner 2016](#); [2018](#)).

Overall, it is important to provide a counterbalance, noting that Haredi space speaks a strongly segregationist “language” that is at the forefront of the isolationist streams confronting the significant change processes underway in Haredi society. These streams resemble the homogeneous Haredi cities that form distinct “islands” on the residential map of Israel. These cities create a space apart that is growing larger in demographic and geographic terms and is becoming more and more enclosed both with relation to its surroundings and in terms of internal ethnic divisions, thus creating double segregation. For those who live within this space, it limits their exposure to processes of modernization and their ability to use and leverage these processes.

While the processes of isolationism, conservatism, and reinforcement of ethnic marginality are more pronounced, it seems as though within this homogeneous structure of separate cities for Haredim there are growing “intrusions” of modernization processes. Thus, ethnic segregation within Haredi space is located between two opposing and deep-seated trends, isolationism, and

modernization. The latter has yet to have a clear impact on spatial-social-cultural development, but its initial effects are apparent in the map of Haredi population distribution in Israel and in the spatial structures that characterize it, and that provide an answer for the developing typology of Haredi identities along the conservatism-modernity scale, with their different desired locations in Haredi space.

Further studies of spatial models might possibly gain from returning to basic Haredi social and ideological structures such as the Lithuanian “society of learners” ([Friedman 1991](#)), the “society of sanctity” culture in the Hasidic model ([Wasserman 2014; 2015](#)), and the softer characteristics of the Mizrahi Haredi communities ([Leon 2010; 2016](#)). This is with a view to examine how they interact with and influence the construction of spatial models in Haredi space. It would also be interesting to further explore the spatial movement of newly religious Haredim ([Cahaner 2018](#)), the Habad community ([Friedman and Heilman 2011](#)), and certain communities within the Breslav Hasidic milieu ([Katz 2016](#)). In addition, it would be useful to continue studying the spaces of modern communities as they move to homes in high-rises, and the development of communities of single Haredi adults on the seamline ([Cahaner 2017a](#)). All these phenomena have broader implications on Haredi space and its place within the general Israeli space.

In terms of applied research, there is seemingly a need for another 300,000 living units for the Haredi public by 2040. The central claim is that the areas of Haredi settlement in Israel need to be planned in light of this rapid population growth and adapted to diverse Haredi population groups as well as processes of change within this society. The problem is that without planning, the Haredi community's isolationism and inability to accept others might lead to a head-on collision between Haredi and non-Haredi populations in Israel. To this effect, planning efforts must ask how the existing spatial models can address the needs of different Haredi groups as well as the spatial relations with the general population ([Bank of Israel 2016; Israeli Ministry of Housing 2015; Raz-Dror and Kost, 2017](#)).

The need for housing solutions for the Haredi population, which is a “problematic” player in the arena of Israeli space, will continue to direct applied research efforts to understand its needs and to assess the necessary supply in the housing market. The change processes that have affected Haredi society in recent decades have led to new spatial models. A worthwhile research evaluation would assess these models and structures according to the axes of social and

spatial conservatism and isolationism, and to the processes of Israelization in Haredi society, of which the new spatial models are largely a result.

Haredi Communities in the Diaspora as a Contributory and Comparative Motif for Haredi Communities in Israel

A potentially fruitful avenue to explore spatial and other aspects of Israeli Haredi society is comparing it with Haredi communities in the Jewish Diaspora. The critical mass of Haredim and largest number of Haredi communities reside in Israel and the United States. Smaller Haredi communities exist in several European countries as well as in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Latin America – mainly in Argentina, Panama, Brazil, and Mexico. Some of these communities received thus far scarce scholarly attention, whereas others have been studied in greater scope and detail. However, the overall extent of these studies do not come close to that of Haredi society and space in Israel.

Clearly, geographical, political, religious, cultural, social, and economic circumstances in each country and society have a significant impact on the character and nature of Haredim and their lifestyles in each country, including spatial aspects. But, nevertheless, a comparative approach could arguably prove beneficial, as Caplan noted two decades ago ([Caplan 2003](#)).

Caplan suggests three possible directions for future research: Comparisons between Haredi communities in different places around the world; comparisons between Haredi communities and non-Jewish fundamentalist groups; and a comparative examination of various issues within Haredi society and between Haredi society and the surrounding Israeli society ([Caplan 2003](#); [2017](#)). These three directions can offer a fertile ground for the study of Haredi space in Israel with its various political, social, economic, and communal aspects, deepen understanding, and offer different perspectives on developments in this space both vis-à-vis the surrounding environment and between its internal population centers.

Regarding comparisons between Israeli and non-Israeli Haredim, it is worthwhile mentioning two studies by Amiram Gonen: One focusing on the differences between the “societies of learners” in the United States and Israel, and the patterns of participation in the labor market of their members ([Gonen 2000](#)), and the other comparing the employment characteristics of Haredi communities in London and in Israel ([Gonen 2005](#)). Gonen drew several conclusions from his research regarding Haredi society in Israel and posed

important questions about the possible entry of Israeli yeshiva students into the labor market. His work has been studied by the relevant government ministries and has been developed into adapted models for the Haredi population in Israel.

Several additional studies adopt this comparative approach: Lightman and Shor focus on the role of communal activists (*askanim*) in Haredi communities in Israel and Canada ([Lightman and Shor 2002](#)); Perry-Hazan compares the Haredi education systems in Israel and in Antwerp ([Perry-Hazan 2013](#); [2015](#)); Wodzinski engaged in mapping Hasidic communities and their international distribution from various spatial points of view ([Wodzinski 2013](#); [2016](#); [2018](#)); Flint compares the Lithuanian community in Jerusalem with its counterpart in London. She focuses on the “boundary line” between halakhic duties and the spatial realities in which they are fulfilled and analyzes the existential tension that threatens the community and its traditional identity in both cities, while reviewing their social, organizational, and spatial mechanisms ([Flint 2012](#)); Finally, it is worth mentioning Levy's observations regarding the Anglophone Haredim in Israel ([Levy 1990](#)), and those of Cahaner and Zicherman regarding the relations between middle-class Haredim in Israel and in the Diaspora ([Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#)).

Although not comparative, several studies serve as a basis for comparisons. Myers studied the community of Satmar Hasidim in Kiryat Yoel, New York, founded in 1977, as a “story of place,” and examined the rapid changes it underwent since then. This case study is a useful gateway to examining the relations between Haredi Jews and New York State, comparing them with the status of religious communities in Israel ([Stolzenberg and Myers 2022](#)). Likewise, the works of Helmreich and Heilman on the yeshiva world in the United States ([Helmreich 1983](#), [Heilman 1992](#)) can shed light on Finkelman and Schiffman and Finkelman's comparative studies between American and Israeli yeshivas and their students, such as examining the differences between their dress, speech, leisure, and exposure to the surrounding culture ([Finkelman 2013](#); [Schiffman and Finkelman 2014](#)).

Additional importance of comparing Israeli Haredi society in Israel with Haredi communities in the Diaspora is that these maintain relations, exchanges, and mutual influence in several areas of life. For example, there are extensive links between the Ashkenazi Haredi community in Israel and those in America and Europe, and between the Mizrahi Haredi community in Israel and its counterparts in France and in several countries in Central America.

Overall, it seems as though links between these communities are based on

familial ties, education, philanthropy, temporary residence, and vacationing. The Hasidic groups, for example, have “mother communities” and “daughter communities” in Israel and abroad, and thus links between them are constant and close, within a framework of institutionalized communal interactions. Among the Lithuanian-Mitnagdic groups, links are seemingly maintained primarily via students in yeshivas, rather than through institutionalized communal relations.

In addition, it would be worthwhile exploring the perceptions of Israeli Haredi communities of those in the Diaspora and examining their mutual relations, to understand what passes along the “supply lines” between these communities in terms of housing, schooling, employment, higher education, community relations, civil society institutions, social characteristics, and ideas and conceptions. A study along these lines will enable to map out the inter-relations and characteristic links between Haredi communities in Israel and abroad, and define the mutual influences of these communities across a range of areas that will support the design of policy tools for addressing various issues in Haredi communities in Israel.

Another area for comparison is the extensive development of the study of fundamentalism and of isolationist groups and communities. Over the years, most researchers of Haredi society have not included in their work any comparisons with fundamentalist and isolationist phenomena in other religions. This comparative methodology was introduced by Emmanuel Sivan and set forth the foundations for studying Haredi society as an “enclave culture” using broad and detailed comparisons with other Christian and Muslim fundamentalist enclaves. Sivan points to the inherent dangers of any situation of majority versus enclave, including lack of clarity, temptation, and deception, which can attract individuals into joining the majority culture, while the enclave model is based on reinforcing borders and opposing external society ([Sivan 1995](#)).

In recent years a number of comparative studies of the Haredi community with isolationist traditional communities have been conducted. For example, Neriya-Ben Shahr compared aspects of the lives of Haredi women with those of Amish in the United States ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2017](#)), and Neuberger and Tamam compared images of Haredim in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* with those of Amish people in the *New York Times* ([Neuberger and Tamam 2014](#)).

In the context of space, Cahaner compares the settlement patterns of communities around the world with the establishment of the new Haredi cities in Israel as “gated suburban communities” ([Cahaner 2017a](#)). Gated communities exist as a model of an environment that is enclosed for social, cultural, religious,

economic, and/or security reasons, which seeks to preserve a separation between those on the inside and those on the outside, but they are not necessarily located distant from cities, and can even exist within the urban landscape ([Handel 2009](#); [Lehavi 2009](#)).

In contrast, the suburb offers better living conditions at the cost of being further away from the city center, requiring commuting at growing costs of time and distance. While the character of the suburb reflects the preferences, ambitions, and values of its resident population, as expressed over time and in response to technological changes and spatial restrictions, it cannot be defined as a gated community. The Haredi suburban cities in Israel, such as Beitar Illit and Ramat Beit Shemesh, are in every respect gated communities yet simultaneously suburbs in essence, in that they were purposefully built within easy reach of Jerusalem and Bnei Brak and maintain interactions with these cities in a way that is characteristic of suburbs rather than gated communities (see [Figure 5.2](#)). Thus, these new Haredi cities are “suburban gated communities.” This definition also allows us to treat them as both suburbs and gated communities ([Cahaner 2016](#); 2017a).

Finally, in the context of spatial patterns, it would be worthwhile to compare isolationist communities around the world, and neighborhoods with a conservative religious identity in mixed cities in other countries. This approach would help us define the characteristics of these communities and neighborhoods and of shared living alongside one another in mixed urban spaces such as Muslim neighborhoods in European cities. Furthermore, it would provide an opportunity to study and create applied spatial models that address the dilemma facing Israeli space in terms of the physical division between the various socio-cultural groups within Israeli society.

Intersecting and Contributory Satellite Fields Related to the Study of Haredi Space

As noted above, geography is by nature multidisciplinary and intertwined with other disciplines and subjects. Thus, the development of Haredi space relates to the demographics of Haredi society, the economic mechanisms that underpin it, and its communal and social choices. In addition, the significant changes that Haredi society has undergone in recent decades in lifestyles, standards of living, economics, and employment also have an impact on the spatial structures and models that form Haredi space. This section thus concentrates on the satellite

fields that intersect and interact with Haredi space and the development of the urban Haredi phenomenon in Israel.

In recent years we see a growth in the number of studies examining various aspects of day-to-day life in Haredi society, most of which adopt a comparative approach vis-à-vis different groups in Israeli society and apply quantitative methodologies that focus on social, cultural, demographic, and economic phenomena and processes. Most of these studies include operational recommendations for steps to be taken by the government and other national authorities. They enable scholars who engage in qualitative research to anchor their work in data and objective realities. Linking between qualitative and quantitative studies and clarifying their intersections has the potential to enrich both with new insights, and to situate them in an historical frame can assist to contextualize this data, findings, and insights.

On a more specific level, we have a body of studies that focus on the socioeconomic structure of the Haredi family and its implications. These studies allow us to create an economic profile of the Haredi family and project future developments, based upon the birth rates within Haredi society and its socioeconomic characteristics. They reveal patterns in the Haredi workforce, which mainly comprises women and a thus far gradually growing proportion of men; the number of Haredi families below the poverty line; the chances of entering the labor market; the average income of Haredi families, which is lower than the overall average in Israel; the various sources of family income; and the typical expenses of the Haredi family. Among the subjects studied via the quantitative prism with comparison to general Israeli society are other issues relating to lifestyles, such as internet use, holding a driver's license, using a private car, consumption characteristics, military conscription, and entry to higher education ([Malach, Hoshen, and Cahaner 2016, 2017](#); [Horowitz 2016](#); [Regev 2013; 2017](#)).

It seems as though many of the doctoral and master's theses focusing on Haredi society completed during the last decade are in this field, mainly looking at the characteristics of Haredi employment market and developments in Haredi participation in higher education ([Kalagy 2010](#); [Trachtengot 2011](#)). These studies provide important data on the demographic and socioeconomic changes affecting Haredi society as compared to non-Haredi Israeli society. Thus, for example, [Table 5.1](#) presents a comparative picture of Haredi women versus non-Haredi Jewish women in Israel across a range of employment, economic, and social characteristics. These processes have a large impact on the spatial choices

of the Haredim.

[Table 5.1](#) [Employment, Economic, and Social Characteristics: Haredi Women Compared with Non-Haredi Jewish Women, 2020](#) ([Malach and Cahaner 2020](#))

| | <i>Haredi Women</i> | <i>Non-Haredi Jewish Women</i> |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Fertility rate | 6–7 children | 2–3 children |
| Family poverty (below the poverty line) | 42% | 11% |
| Employed in education | 38% | 17% |
| Sit matriculation exams | 55% | 96% |
| Study in higher education | 28% (67% of Haredi students are women) | 45% |
| Employment rate | 76% | 83% |
| Average monthly wage | NIS 6,908 | NIS 10,410 |
| Average gross hourly wage | NIS 55 | NIS 64 |
| Work in a part-time job | 42% | 27% |
| Use the internet | 56% | 90% |
| Travel to work by car | 16% | 45% |
| Travel to work on foot or by public transport | 62% | 24% |
| Hold a driving license | 32% | 75% |

Within the socioeconomic context, it is especially important to pay attention to the differences between Haredi groups as well as to sub-communities within Haredi society, along the scale between conservatism and modernity. Although Caplan noted that the breakdown of socioeconomic and demographic questions by sub-communities still awaits serious study ([Caplan 2017](#)), we evidence growing research interest in this area in the form of large-scale surveys conducted with respondents from all sub-groups in Haredi society. These surveys include questions on standards of living, lifestyles, and views and opinions regarding various issues, with the study population analyzed according to the scale from modernity to conservatism and according to the classic communal divisions ([Cahaner 2020a](#); [Shaharit 2014](#)) or by division according to

location, including the new Haredi cities and Haredi communities in development towns ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [2015](#); [Cahaner and Tzfadia 2016](#)). Recently Eitan Regev analyzed administrative data according to Haredi sub-communities and characterized different patterns of Haredi integration into the labor market for each sub-community. This study also contains a spatial element ([Regev 2017](#)).

Understanding the demographic-economic-social data by sub-community has significant implications for the structuring and analysis of Haredi space, as we can see in [Table 5.2](#).

[Table 5.2](#) [Demographic, Employment, Economic, Social, and Cultural Characteristics According to Haredi Sub-Community and Location on the Conservative](#)

| | <i>Total Sample</i> | <i>Haredi Identity – From Conservative to Modern</i> | | | |
|--|---------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | <i>Conservative Haredi</i> | <i>Classic Haredi</i> | <i>Haredi with Modern Elements</i> | <i>Modern Haredi</i> |
| Live births per woman aged 40 | 6.7 | 8.2 | 7.1 | 5.6 | 4.7 |
| Average age at first marriage – women | 20.6 | 20.4 | 20.5 | 20.8 | 20.9 |
| Average age at first marriage – men | 22.4 | 21.8 | 22.6 | 22.4 | 22.9 |
| Employment rate – men | 41% | 36% | 35% | 48% | 74% |
| Work in a Haredi-only work environment | 42% | 58% | 37% | 39% | 37% |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| – men | | | | | |
| Work in a Haredi-only work environment | 60% | 72% | 65% | 48% | 38% |
| – women | | | | | |
| Belong to the same type of community as my parents | 61% | 70% | 64% | 58% | 38% |
| Own a car | 43% | 26% | 39% | 54% | 69% |
| Have a driving license – men | 62% | 45% | 59% | 75% | 87% |
| Have a driving license – women | 21% | 9% | 18% | 29% | 49% |
| Own a 4-bedroom apartment | 27% | 21% | 27% | 29% | 36% |
| Use unfiltered internet | 12% | 3% | 4% | 21% | 32% |
| Own a “non-kosher” smartphone | 16% | 4% | 8% | 24% | 45% |
| Take vacations abroad | 27% | 16% | 25% | 31% | 44% |
| Always wear a suit outside the home | 55% | 81% | 63% | 34% | 18% |

From: [Cahaner \(2020a\)](#).

We know very little about the internal economy of Haredi society or about the array of charitable organizations, non-profits, stores, and free loan associations that are a feature of Haredi space. This phenomena has a considerable impact on the Haredi economic unit and on administrative and government data. Scholars

often perceive the internal Haredi economy as a sensitive topic and find it challenging to obtain reliable information in this regard. In the spatial context, the issue of the informal Haredi economy is of great importance due to the need to plan and create space for its existence within homes, storerooms, and ground-floor apartments in apartment blocks, for example, as well as the question of the need, or lack thereof, for shopping malls in Haredi areas and the impact of the internet on the internal Haredi economy – to name of two of many additional aspects.

There are many economic, social, and spatial implications of the issue of home-based sales and the household economy, and very few studies of this issue from an economic-spatial perspective. To this effect, [Table 5.3](#) offers a comparative picture of the purchase of products from unofficial home-based stores in Haredi suburban cities at two points in time, 2007 and 2015.

[**Table 5.3**](#) [**Rates of Purchase from Stores Located in Private Homes in Haredi Suburban Cities, 2007 and 2015**](#)

| | 2007 | 2015 |
|--|------|------|
| Wigs | 30% | 40% |
| Jewelry | 25% | 18% |
| Silverware for the home | 14% | 13% |
| Religious artifacts and books | 18% | 11% |
| Dresses and skirts | 13% | 7% |
| Furniture and electrical appliances | 10% | 5% |
| Children's clothing | 8% | 3% |
| Shoes | 6% | 3% |
| Men's suits and hats | 9% | 3% |

From: Cahaner (2009; [2015](#)).

The table shows that between 2007 and 2015, the rate of purchasing from stores in private homes dropped for most products, apart from wigs. This finding reflects the growth of commercial infrastructures in Haredi towns and the growth in the number of stores available in Haredi cities. Another process that has occurred is the development and conversion of home-selling enterprises into established stores. This is now official commerce, which is different from classic

forms of sales that were common in Haredi space. Other important factors have been the diverse nature of the populations in the Haredi cities; the continued spread of brands and the culture of consumption into the Haredi sector; exposure to the possibility of importing products from abroad; exposure to the culture of online shopping; and the development of a culture of spending time in the mall. All of these have led to a rise in Haredi shopping outside of Haredi cities and outside of the internal Haredi economy ([Cahaner 2015](#)).

Another satellite field to spatial research, and a function of the concentrated distribution of population in Israeli space, is the study of designated transportation for Haredim. Very few studies and articles have been published on this subject. One of the first and most important is that of [Schneller and Vygotsky \(2006\)](#), which examined the characteristics of Haredi public transport, and was followed by several additional internal reports prepared by staff at the Israeli Ministry of Transport which formed the national transportation masterplan developed by the ministry between 2013 and 2017 ([Caplan, Inbar, and Cahaner 2015](#)).

Studies of Haredi transport focused primarily on the legal perspective, regarding the issue of separation between men and women on buses and whether it constitutes gender discrimination in the public place ([Harel and Shenrach 2003](#); [Rimalt 2003](#); [Triger 2012](#)). In addition, highway safety in Haredi society has been explored ([Avner 2007](#); [Guggenheim 2010](#)). In the spatial context, the issue of designated public transport is critical for strengthening the model of complementary spatial isolation and for the separation of the Haredi population within the space of the State ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [2016](#)).

The extent of the impact of spatial mobility is an important factor. The use of designated public transport, serving only the Haredi population and adapted to its needs regarding gender and modesty, has transformed the lines connecting Haredi population centers into a form of “isolated corridors,” in which there is almost no interaction with the general population, and which thus reinforce the creation of a contiguous and stable socioeconomic space reserved for Haredim. This model is similar to that of other communities that are connected via a designated transport network that increases the stability of the space of minority groups ([Handel 2009](#); [2014](#); [Rodgers 2004](#)).

In the spatial context, public transport is indeed a necessary condition for the existence and flourishing of Haredi population centers. Public transport also enables daily instrumentalism, as the homogeneous Haredi cities contain a form of autarkic economy in transportation services as well, which enable them to

maintain “spatially complementary isolationism” and exist as cities that are almost entirely cut off from their surroundings – connected to the main Haredi cities Jerusalem and Bnei Brak ([Cahaner 2009b](#); [2016](#); Shilhav and Cahaner 2012a). This is connected in part to recent data denoting a rise in the rate of access to private transportation and in the number of Haredim with driving licenses, as shown in [Table 5.4](#) ([Malach, Hoshen, and Cahaner 2017](#)). Thus, the impact of modernization and the formation of a Haredi middle class are likely to influence the transportation-spatial model of Haredi society.

[Table 5.4](#) [Vacationing and Transport Use – Comparison between Haredi and Non-Haredi Jews, 2005 and 2020](#)

| | | 2005 | | 2020 | |
|--------------------|---|---------------|------------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| | | <i>Haredi</i> | <i>Non-Haredi Jews</i> | <i>Haredi</i> | <i>Non-Haredi Jews</i> |
| Vacationing | Took a vacation in Israel including overnight stay | 47% | 56% | 58% | 60% |
| | Took a vacation abroad | 11% | 33% | 16% | 52% |
| Transport | Access to private car among over 20s | 29% | 69% | 42% | 81% |
| | Men holding a driver's license | 52% | 86% | 58% | 90% |
| | Women holding a driver's license | 21% | 60% | 32% | 75% |

From: [Malach and Cahaner \(2020\)](#).

Another yet important satellite field in the spatial context is the study of Haredi patterns of leisure, tourism, and vacationing. Over the last decade, several studies and surveys have documented tourism and vacationing characteristics of the Haredi community in Israel ([Cahaner and Mansfeld 2012](#); [Israeli Ministry of Tourism 2007](#); [2013a](#); [2013b](#)). These studies focus on vacationing models that are popular with the Haredi population, and include models of family vacation, couples' vacation, as well as models based on gender and community, including men's and women's trips – separately ([Klin-Oron 2005](#); [Mansfeld and Cahaner 2013](#)). Other studies explored Haredi motivations for traveling, traveling patterns, and a range of characteristics and behaviors associated with Haredi vacationing, as well as the development of a tourism infrastructure that adapted to these features ([Mansfeld, Jonas, and Cahaner 2014](#); [Israeli Ministry of Tourism 2013b](#)). Another series of studies has examined the “risk perspectives” of Haredi tourists and the mechanisms employed by the tourism system to deal with them ([Cahaner, Mansfeld, and Jonas 2015](#); [Jonas, Cahaner, and Mansfeld 2019](#); [Mansfeld, Jonas, and Cahaner 2014](#)).

Some of these studies address sub-community nuances of travel and tourism patterns according to the various streams within the Haredi sector ([Mansfeld and Cahaner 2013](#)). Others indicate the emergence of a culture of luxury, imported from Western and Israeli culture, and examined the phenomena of Haredim spending time in malls ([El Or and Neriya-Ben Shahr 2003](#)); taking regular vacations abroad ([Zicherman and Cahaner 2012](#)); visiting museums such as Yad Vashem, the Israel Museum, and museums operated by the Israeli Ministry of Defense; and taking various types of nature tours ([Caplan and Stadler 2012](#)).

Quantitative studies show that while there is a large difference between general Israeli society and the Haredi sector in terms of the number of people taking vacations, over the last decade there has been a rise in the proportion of Haredim vacationing abroad (see [Table 5.3](#)). This trend can be partially explained by factors that affected Israeli society in general, such as Israel's “open skies” reform, but it also stems from the increase in Haredim entering higher education and employment, which has led to a rise in available income, as well as growing awareness of leisure and vacation culture in Haredi society, especially within Haredi middle class ([Malach, Hoshen, and Cahaner 2017](#)).

Another satellite field that has received little attention is environmental and ecological studies, in which only two initial studies have been carried out. The first looked at Haredi society and the environment in the context of the exodus of the Haredi population to the new cities ([Shilhav and Caplan 2003](#)), and the

second is an ethnographic study of attitudes toward recycling in Haredi society ([Yoreh 2010](#)). This study looks at the role played by rabbinical leaders and its influence on environmental issues, with an emphasis on environmental education in Haredi society, which, the author claims, could result in a high rate of recycling in Haredi neighborhoods and significantly improve the quality of life within them.

Applied Studies versus and Alongside Theoretical-Academic Studies

As mentioned above, geography encompasses both academic and applied studies. University geography departments respect applied language, affording it a place in the literature and being enriched by it. This includes the study of planning and urban development, architecture, the use of innovative mapping tools such as remote sensors and GIS, the capabilities offered by “big data” for creating broad, reliable prisms for spatial research, and comparing communities and social groups.

Alongside scholars from academia, there are the researchers from various government ministries, primarily those of Housing, Transport, and Economy, as well as the Knesset, from large survey institutes, and from various research institutes such as the Israel Democracy Institute, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies, and the Haredi Institute for Public Affairs.

Applied geographical research seeks to address the tension between the different spatial needs of the Haredi public and the general Israeli space in which it resides, including its physical structure and the groups that make up Israeli society. It looks at the development of Haredi space in Israel, the motivating factors behind the housing choices, the implications of living in separate cities versus living in mixed areas, the characteristics of housing demand, and the impact of socioeconomic processes within the Haredi community itself and between it and the general population ([Degani and Degani 2000](#); [Israeli Ministry of Housing 2015](#); [Sadan, Gonen, and Plesner 2011](#); [Canaan, Stern, and Uziel-Carmel 2006](#)). Based upon these studies, the field of planning offers an array of solutions that are adapted to the demands of the Haredi population on the one hand, and to the realistic possibilities for meeting these demands, on the other hand ([Bank of Israel 2016](#); [Israeli Ministry of Housing 2015](#); [Raz-Dror and Kost 2017](#)). Geographers are involved as well in producing the masterplan for

transport that is based on the distribution of Haredi population centers throughout Israel (Kaplan, Inbar, and [Cabaner 2016](#)).

The scientific role of the community of policy and implementation research concerning Haredi society has become an issue in the academic discourse in recent years. At its heart lies an implicit criticism of policy and implementation researchers in their role as supplying the research basis for policy studies. This criticism concerns an erosion of the critical tools that are necessary for producing authoritative and reliable knowledge; the preference for pragmatic research over critical research; the abandonment of scientific research circles for arenas that are often characterized critically as “social engineering”; and equally labeled as shallowing academic knowledge in order to advance social interests that serve various political elements.

Thus, for example, Caplan mentions explicit criticism directed at applied research of Haredi society, based on the belief that the large number of studies of this type indicates the large scale of resources dedicated to these issues, the considerable public attention they attract, and the ideas regarding the importance of Haredim in maintaining and strengthening the economic resilience of the State of Israel ([Caplan 2017](#)). At the same time, it feeds the discourse regarding these issues and preserves the justification for investing resources in studying them. Caplan claims further that in light of the methodological and other shortcomings that characterize some of these studies, this energetic level of engagement with these subjects serves the interests of public opinion, power, and capital, which are shared by politicians, institutes that are perceived as specializing in designing policy in various areas, and Haredim who act as socioeconomic agents and gate-keepers. He argues that one of the problems that characterizes these studies is the lack of effort by their authors to properly understand the fabric of Haredi communal life as well as an inability to decode crucial issues in the study of Haredi society in its historical context ([Caplan 2017](#)).

Indeed, the study of changes and identities in Haredi society demands a combination of two worlds that are to a large extent in opposition to one another, or at least separate from one another, in geographical discourse: that of values, and that of applied discourse. This approach does not lead to a “dumbing down” of academic knowledge, but rather to developing a corpus of knowledge for the future planning of Haredi society per its needs and agendas. This requires developing proposals and recommendations based upon quantitative and qualitative data, with a view, in the case of this chapter, to constructing Haredi

space and shared space for the different communities in Israeli society. The role of geographical researchers who were trained in academia is indeed to create theoretical and comparative frameworks for designing and recommending policy. In other words, to combine various approaches and studying patterns for possible implementation.

Conclusion: Accomplishments, Challenges, and Future Research Needs

The aim of this chapter was to provide a picture of the current state of research knowledge regarding the development of Haredi space in Israel, and to identify subjects and directions that have not yet been studied and which should be included in future research, including both subjects that have received no attention and subjects that received attention in the past but ought to be updated.

Overall, there are several forms of Haredi settlement and geographical livelihood in Israel: Major traditional Haredi cities; new homogeneous Haredi cities, which operate as suburban bounded communities; Haredi neighborhoods within non-Haredi cities; and Haredim who live on the seamline between Haredi space and general space.

As we outlined in detail, the study of Haredi space can be divided into three periods that are characterized by a gradual process of development of new directions and horizons. From “complementary isolationism” to a focus on the new Haredi cities and the areas of tension and friction with non-Haredi populations and identifying future housing needs, and onward to exploring the development of the spatial-social process of Haredi space that is influenced by contradicting forces of spatial isolationism characterized by ghettoization on the one hand, and of modernization and Israelization which have led to changes in Haredi spatial structures on the other hand.

By the very nature of the field, the analysis of these spatial manifestations and their dynamics is situated between two forms of discourse: Theoretical-academic-scholarly and practical that focuses on the need for housing solutions.

The academic-theoretical research discourse emphasizes the development processes of Haredi space and focuses on analyzing the developing spatial structures as a response to the typology of Haredi identities on the scale from conservative to modern, which require different locations within Haredi space. The applied research discourse focuses on the future need for approximately 300,000 additional housing units for the Haredi population by 2040, and on the

question of what are the most suitable set of spatial solutions that will serve this need. This is by considering the spatial-economic-social needs of Israel as a whole. In this context, Haredi population is perceived as an especially challenging, somewhat “problematic” community in the Israeli spatial scene, that demands attention and solutions.

The map below shows the residential locations with potential for future Haredi expansion in the short term, as of 2018. In the north, these include the expansion of the Hadar neighborhood in Haifa, Upper Tiberias, Upper Nazareth, the Haredification of Afula Illit and Givat Hamoreh, and the continued Haredification of Safed. In the south, there is the expansion of the Haredi concentrations in Kiryat Gat and Kiryat Malachi, the growing Haredi neighborhoods in Ofakim, and the Haredi population in Arad. Currently, the government's decision regarding the establishment of another Haredi city in the area of Kseifa is still pending. This is due to the disagreement about the approach of creating separate Haredi cities, particularly in the periphery, or developing Haredi concentrations.

Finally, in Central Israel, there is potential for expansion in the existing Haredi suburban cities of Beit Shemesh, Modi'in Illit, and Beitar Illit), as well as in the Lod region (Ahisemekh), where a large Haredi neighborhood is being built.

Overall, this preliminary review of the scholarly literature, as well as developments over time, denotes some of the main accomplishments in the study of Haredi geography over the past decades. For instance, identifying spatial models that have characterized Haredi society over the years and throughout various changes; understanding these models in their academic and applied contexts; and highlighting those areas in which there is a lack of research and that present a challenge for the future. I contend that future research will do well to pay attention to the four following directions:

1. Mapping and analysis of Israel's land reserves and suggesting locations for Haredi population according to various models, in accordance with the changing character of this society.
2. Exploring the relations between Haredim and non-Haredim in shared spaces in mixed cities in the center of Israel and the periphery, including an analysis of the social, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics of the Haredi population. This direction, in its applied context, should include the development of a model for “shared living” in both neighborhood spaces

and public spaces.

3. Examining specific spatial patterns of particular Haredi groups and sub-groups has been done in other disciplines and contexts. It is essential to focus keenly on a particular aspect of the fabric of group living and to develop a perspective with which it may be possible to track the experiences of these groups and the lifestyles that characterize them, as their members' perceptions of space can be a contributing factor in understanding the difference between Haredi groups. In the spatial context, we should encourage socio-spatial studies that will tell the “story of a place” or a “community,” in order to establish whether and to what extent these can express the differences between groups, and what they can teach us about the spatial structures of Haredi sub-communities.
4. Developing new spatial models and applying them to the Haredi population. These might include the formation of residential spaces for single Haredim, the development of Haredi student communities such as that in the Pardes Katz neighborhood of Bnei Brak, the Haredi transition to living in tower blocks, Haredi settlement in cooperative communities such as Or Haganuz, and further study of modern Haredi communities as they move to living on the “seamline” between general space and Haredi space.

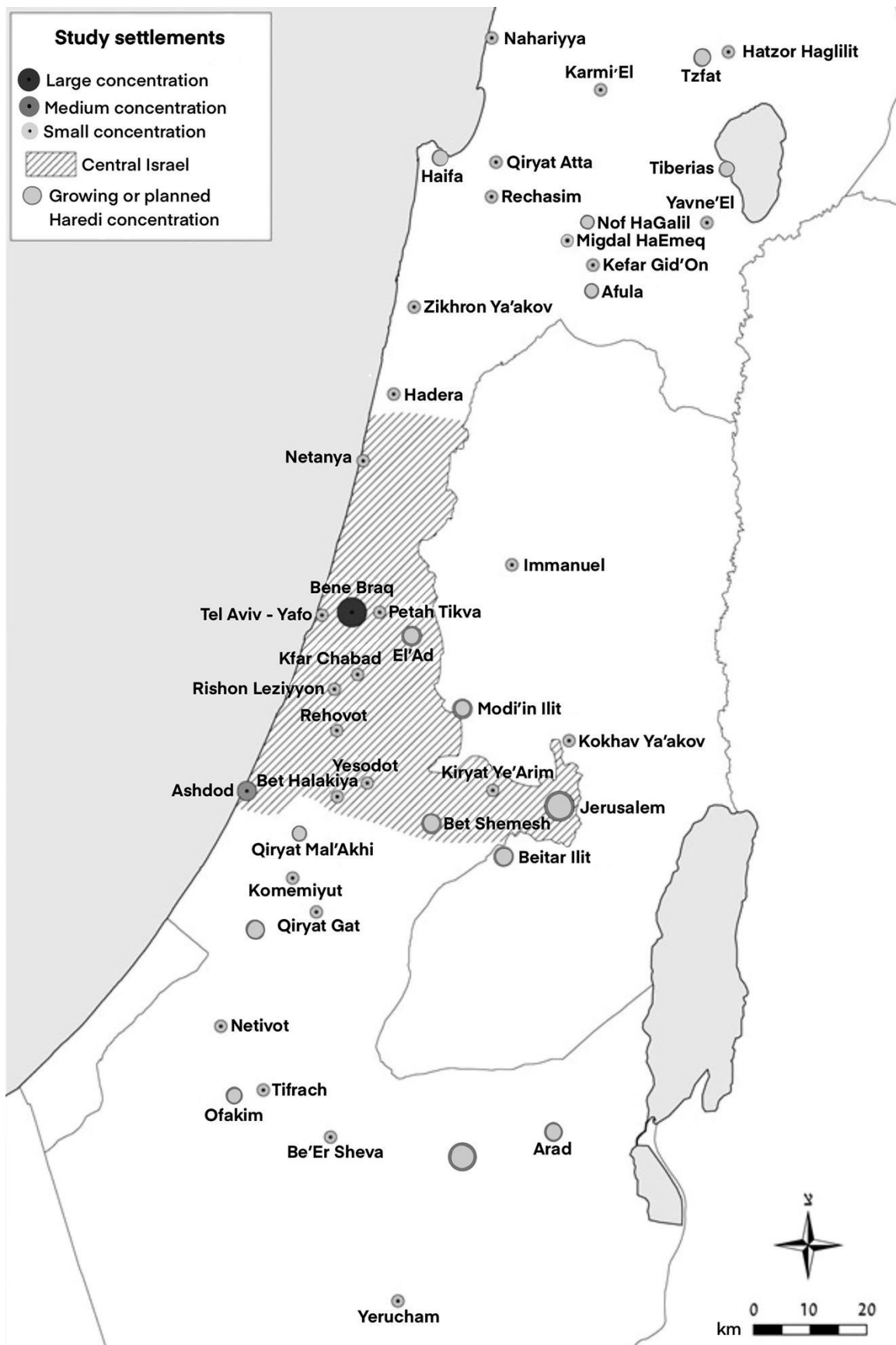


Figure 5.4 Map of the Distribution of Haredi Space and Indication of Growing Trends, 2018.

This chapter has also focused on other lacunae related to the in-depth study of satellite subjects connected to the study of Haredi space and developing spatial models that draw upon different disciplines and use diverse research tools. For example, it is suggested to further explore transportation, tourism, environment, ecology, and economy as these aspects all relate to lifestyles and standards of living in Haredi society.

In this context, special attention ought to be given to the internal Haredi economy and its expression in Haredi space. Topics that are related to this issue include planning and providing space for these initiatives in the Haredi urban landscape, determining whether there is a need for shopping malls in Haredi spaces, and defining the influence of online consumption on the space of the internal Haredi economy.

Another thus far-overlooked satellite subject concerns the interface between physical space and virtual space. “Virtual space” is already breaking down the walls of the social and spatial Haredi enclave and beginning to alter Haredi identity. Virtual Haredi space, hidden from the prying eye of the community, makes it possible to maintain two identities simultaneously: A more open, permissive, and exposed online identity, and a more conservative real-world identity of the separated or “seamline” space. It would be worthwhile exploring the decision to be part of the online space, which exists outside the boundaries of traditional Haredi space and allows Haredi individuals to escape the peer pressure of the community and act more freely, while either maintaining or ignoring the social codes to which they were educated. Within this space, they can find new virtual groups of belonging, new communities that are aligned with emerging Haredi identities, and thus create opportunities to expand their physical and ideational circle of friends.

Another research lacuna highlighted in this chapter is the paucity of comparative studies with Haredi communities in the Jewish Diaspora. The comparative literature on communities around the world and the study of research cases can help us understand the relationships and mutual influences between Haredi communities in Israel and abroad. It will be worthwhile examining the perspective of various Haredi communities in Israel toward Diaspora Haredi communities and the interactions between them, and exploring

the influential inter-relationships between these communities as they relate to housing, education, employment, community relations, the development of civil society institutions, social characteristics, and ideas and worldviews.

The importance of these studies and their contribution is likely to be rooted first and foremost in the opportunity they offer to map the inter-relations between Haredi communities in Israel and abroad, but they will also make it possible to design policy tools to develop various aspects of Haredi communities in Israel. In the spatial context, there is room to further develop comparative research between the Haredi community in Israel and other isolationist communities in the world, or conservative religious neighborhoods in mixed cities in other countries. In the latter case, the first goal is to understand the characteristics of shared living between in mixed urban spaces, and the second goal is to learn how to create applied spatial models for dealing with the dilemma facing planners in Israel regarding the distribution of space among the “tribes” that formulate Israeli society.

Note

1. [The right to a city is the right of anyone who lives in a city and uses it to become a creator of urban space](#), and thereby to demand, as an individual and as a community, the right to equality in terms of the allocation of municipal resources and in terms of being able to freely use every space in the city (Fenster and Manor 2010; [Lefebvre 1991](#)).

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6 Not Just Wall Posters

Mass Media in Israeli Haredi Society

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Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the scholarship on communications and media in Israeli Haredi society, as well an account of areas that remain academically unexplored. The research for this chapter is based upon several sources: searches for publications in a range of university search engines, using several key words such as Haredim, communications, media, press, radio, television, and internet; a list of references prepared by Caplan (2007); a collection of books, articles, and bibliographies that I built up over the years. Finally, I leaned upon the expertise of several scholars.

I will use the work of two prominent media scholars in my attempt to portray media and communications in Haredi society: Harold Lasswell and Marshall McLuhan. Lasswell's communication model consists of five elements: the originator of the message, the message itself, the channel via which it is disseminated, the target audience, and the effect. Lasswell proposes that acts of communication can be described by answering the following questions: (1) who (2) says what (3) in which channel (4) to whom (5) with what effect? ([Lasswell 1948](#), 117). Marshall McLuhan coined the well-known phrase “the medium is the message,” and called upon students of communication to focus first and foremost on the channels of communication themselves ([McLuhan 1967](#)).

This chapter is divided into four sections addressing four main types of media that make up the scene of Haredi communications in Israel, as in other Western societies:

1. General Print Media: Daily, local, weekly, and monthly newspapers and magazines, as well as special printed publications such as Synagogue pamphlets that are distributed typically on Sabbath and Jewish Holidays, and billboard posters (known as).¹
2. Audio Media: Tapes and radio.
3. Audio-Visual Media: Video products on CD and DVD, movies, and television.
4. New Media: Internet and cellular phones, both smart and “dumb” phones.

After a brief presentation of current data regarding reach and distribution where these exist of each one of these media channels, I will describe research into messages, originators, and target audiences in line with Lasswell's model. The research surveyed in this chapter is generally presented according to context and in chronological order of its publication, and as such this order does not imply any statement or preference. The research critique provided in this chapter is of a more general type and appears in the section on research lacunae. The main lacunae that emerge are those of institutional-economic studies, research into social networks, quantitative studies in general, and particularly studies on the effects of the various media types.

This review indicates a complex process of the emergence of non-establishment Haredi media outlets which have flourished around the existing establishment outlets. In most cases, these emergent media are not limited to a specific Haredi group or community, but rather address the entire Haredi sector, and, at times, other potential groups such as the Zionist National-Haredi sector. A discussion of this process and its significance appears in the last section of this chapter.

Print Media

Distribution Data

There are four daily Haredi newspapers published in Hebrew in Israel: *Hamodia*, *Yated Ne'eman*, *Hamevaser*, and *Hapeles*. According to the 2018 TGI survey of

Haredi media (Kikar Hashabat 2018),² the weekly distribution figures for these newspapers was as follows: *Hamodia* 16.6%; *Yated Ne'eman* 16.2%; *Hamevaser* 13.5%; *Hapeles* 11.2%. It should be noted that two of these papers are distributed free of charge in Haredi populated centers one day a week: *Yated Ne'eman* on Tuesdays, when it reaches distribution figures of 41.2%, and *Hapeles* on Friday, reaching a distribution of 10.7%.³ There is one digital daily Haredi newspaper, *Shaharit*, that, according to its website, has 68,000 subscribers.

Several additional national weekly papers appear toward the weekend. According to the aforementioned survey, the distribution shares for these are as follows: *Mishpahah* 21%; *Bakehilah* 11.1%; *Sha'ah Tovah* 1.8%; *Yom Leyom* 2.9%; and *Ketifah* 12.1%. There are also local weekly newspapers published by two main local newspaper chains: *Kav Itonut Datit* 25.8% and *Merkaz Hainyanim for the Haredi Public* 19.1%. As for monthly journals, the two major titles are *Teimot*, with 10.1% distribution share, and *Zeman* with 19.6%.

These figures are indicative of several important differences between Haredi society and general Israeli society. The main difference is that while print journalism is in turmoil in Israel and throughout the world, with papers closing or being either partially or entirely online, in the Haredi sector two new dailies were founded since 2000, while weekly and daily papers continue to enjoy reasonable distribution figures.

Another difference is that general distribution figures usually rise toward the weekend, whereas for Haredi papers they fall. There are two plausible explanations for this phenomenon: The value-based explanation is that in the Haredi sector, the focus on Shabbat is on prayer, family time, Torah study, and rest, as opposed to leisure time that includes reading newspapers and books as seen in other societies. On the commercial side, there are several popular weeklies published toward the weekend, which has an impact on reading figures for the major dailies.

General Characteristics and Messages

The first articles on the Haredi press in Israel were written by journalists who covered Haredi society, and they were based more on their authors' personal impressions than on systematic academic research. Levy surveyed the main Haredi newspapers published in Israel, and described their defining characteristics: Their relation to the state and to Zionism; their description of

events written in a way that seeks to influence events, rather than simply to report on them, including a phrase attributed to the former editor of *Hamodia*, Moshe Akiva Druck, according to which the public has a “right not to know” ([Levy 1989](#), 247); their description of political issues and internal political divisions, including the use of honorific titles for some and the airbrushing out of others; and the gap between the formal newspapers and the informal *pashkevilim* ([Levy 1989](#); [1990](#)).

Michelson described the establishment of *Yom Hashishi* and *Yated Ne'eman*, demarcated the boundaries of Haredi press coverage namely the subjects and words that are permitted and forbidden, and described the papers' oversight and censorship committees ([Michelson 1990](#)). Shahril Ilan related to the internal and external Haredi political aspects of the party-affiliated newspapers *Hamodia*, *Yated Ne'eman*, and *Yom Leyom*. He pointed to the lack of distinction between editorial content and advertising content, including the publication of editorial articles produced as part of comprehensive advertising packages, a topic that deserves close scholarly attention ([Ilan 1993](#)).

[Hayerushalmi \(1998\)](#) noted some unique phenomena of the ideological Haredi press and described its censorship characteristics in detail. Arieli described the two main motivations for the creation of the Haredi press: The need for a sectorial newspaper to reflect and support communal life, and to act as a replacement for the secular Israeli press. He points to a main difference between the Haredi party-affiliated newspapers and the independent commercial papers, suggesting that whereas the former provides general information, and acts as mouthpieces for politicians, the latter provide more varied and critical information ([Arieli 2001](#)). It is important to note in this context that the commercial Haredi papers publish investigative journalism and lead social struggles that include criticism of public representatives, as they are relatively anti-establishment.

Moving from journalists to scholars, Caplan wrote about the Haredi press as part of an initial description of media outlets in Israeli Haredi society. Subsequently, he described the main characteristics and developments of the Haredi press ([Caplan 2001](#); [2006b](#)). In addition to the characteristics listed above, he expands on issues of integration with and isolationism from surrounding Israeli society; the identity of writers, including the use of pen names and the concealment of women writers; the declaration of intent to abide by Orthodox-halakhic rules against gossip and slander; the ways in which the papers address non-Haredi populations; the platform they provide for responding

to issues relating mainly to Haredi society that appear in the non-Haredi media, and particularly in the non-Haredi press; and their role in voicing internal self-criticism regarding various social phenomena within the Haredi community. In terms of content and language, Caplan points to the writers' reliance on their readers' associative mastery of the canon of classical traditional Jewish sources; their extensive deployment of sub-textual codes, sophisticated turns of phrase, and textual clues to refer to the leadership hierarchies in various Haredi sub-groups; the use of aggressive and harsh rhetoric; and the use of imagery and poetic language that often strays into the realms of exaggeration.

Cohen wrote encyclopedia entries on *Hamodia* and *Yated Ne'eman*, and also described the structure of the Haredi press, its content, the advertising it features, characteristics of religious reporters, and the audiences it reaches ([Cohen 2006a](#); [2013a](#); [2017d](#)). I provided an initial mapping of 32 Hebrew Haredi publications produced in Israel in 2007 which meet the definition of “newspaper” as it appears in the Press Regulations issued in 1933: two daily papers, twenty weeklies, four monthly journals, and six periodicals. I claimed that the most salient characteristic of Haredi papers, whether daily or other, is their ideological orientation. Thus, even the commercial Haredi newspapers, whose purpose is to make profits for their owners, still operate within Haredi ideological boundaries and will not stray from them. The explanation provided was that because the Haredi party-affiliated daily paper is almost the only form of media that has a “kosher certificate” for distribution among the Haredi public, these dailies are able to survive in the long term. This explanation would seem to predict the doubling of Haredi party-affiliated newspapers from two to four ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2008](#)).

Finally, Katz viewed the Haredi press as an alternative media serving a worried counter-culture within Israeli society, which creates a communal identity ([Katz 2012](#)), and Mann indicated the possible connection between the growth in Haredi newspapers and the emergence of the new Haredi middle classes ([Mann 2016](#)).

In contrast with these surveys, which looked at Haredi press as one encompassing entity, we have very few studies that focus on specific newspapers, and they tend to be limited in scope. Zrahiya described the establishment of *Yated Ne'eman* and claimed that the subjects covered by the paper were, over time, beginning more to resemble the subjects covered by the secular press ([Zrahiya 1989](#)). Twelve years later Feldman described the development and characteristics of Shas' daily, *Yom Leyom* ([Feldman 2001](#)).

This was followed by Goez's examination of the social identity of *Yom Leyom*, who found that this paper adopted a narrow Haredi-religious Mizrahi identity rather than a broader Mizrahi identity that would encompass the full spectrum of Haredi, religious, traditional, and secular Mizrachim ([Goez 2003](#)). [Neriya-Ben Shahar \(2021b\)](#) described the framing of the new Israeli governments (2013; 2015; 2019) in the Haredi daily newspapers. The texts reflect the perception of “we, the Haredi” against “them, the secular” with specific references to Haredi parliament members such as Litzman and Gafni, compared to the ultimate “others” including Lapid and Lieberman.

Linguistic Aspects

The Haredi press has several unique linguistic features. Baumel ([2002](#); [2006](#)) analyzed the policies of accepted language in a few newspapers and found that all of them use language that expresses cultural uniformity and distinguishes the Haredi community from the rest of Israeli society. The differences between the papers lay in the level to which they make these distinctions, placing them on a social spectrum between openness and closedness ([Baumel 2002](#); [2006](#)). Sela compared the linguistic aspects of columnist writing published in *Hamodia*, *Yated Ne'eman*, and *Yom Leyom*, looking at the categories of vocabulary, grammar, semantics, and rhetoric. She found that these papers deploy a unique Haredi sociolect and figurative language that includes a diverse range of imagery and metaphor. The texts were also characterized by a contentious and emotional form of writing that included the Midrashic and biblical texts. From a comparative perspective, Sela found that the linguistic level of *Hamodia* and *Yated Ne'eman* was higher than that of *Yom Leyom* across most categories ([Sela 2005](#)).

Representations of the Holocaust

Of special attention is representations of the Holocaust in the Haredi press. These are indicative of the relationship between Haredi society's official voices and this traumatic event on all accounts. Goldberg examined the Holocaust imagery that appeared in the *Beit Yaakov* monthly between 1949 and 1980, and found three main categories of perspectives: (1) collective memory, including the social codes of acts of sanctifying God's name [in death] and miracles in which Torah scrolls were saved and Torah learning was preserved; (2) counter-memory, relating to the friction with Zionist and secular forms of Holocaust

memory; and (3) repressed voices, which express the difficulty of dealing with the internal tensions within the Haredi narrative of the Holocaust ([Goldberg 1998](#)). Ebenstein analyzed the Holocaust Memorial Day editions of the Haredi dailies between 1950 and 2000. Her findings show that Haredim deal with the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Day using an ambivalent mechanism of memory-via-rejection. She concludes that Holocaust Memorial Day is a microcosm not only of the complex relations between the Haredi community and the Holocaust, but also of its relations with the surrounding secular state and society ([Ebenstein 2003](#)).

Tsarfaty examined the shaping of media discourse in the Haredi press on Holocaust Memorial Day in *Hamodia*, *Yated Ne'eman*, and *Hamahaneh Haharedi* between 1990 and 2000. She found that this discourse contains criticism of secular and Zionist Israeli society, along with a discussion of the contrast between Jewish heroism and Zionist heroism, which includes the presentation of the State of Israel as the “answer” to the Holocaust. Her findings indicate an avoidance of issues that might challenge beliefs, such as theological explorations of the Holocaust ([Tsarfaty 2001](#)).

This media discourse is divided by Tsarfaty into two types: The first is preservation discourse, which, similar to Goldberg, passes on historical traditions and creates a shared historic consciousness, collective memory, and counter-memory, within the group. The second is conflict discourse, which counters the Zionist historical narrative and the founding values and myths of Israeli secular society, and focuses on the issues that are at the heart of the conflict with that society, such as attitudes toward Holocaust Memorial Day, Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel, the Memorial Day for Israeli soldiers who died in service, and Independence Day that follows. In addition, this discourse confronts the Jewish character of the state and the powers of state institutions, the deference of military service granted to Haredi men who devote their time to studying Torah, and state financial support for Haredi yeshivas ([Tsarfaty 2003](#)).

Finally, two master's theses examined the ways in which *Hamodia* and *Yated Ne'eman* address the conflictual relationship between Haredi society, Zionism, and the Holocaust. One found that the quantity of writing on the Holocaust increased over the years and contains a greater focus on commemoration within the Haredi community than on the nature of commemoration in general Israeli society. Thus, the creation of a Haredi collective identity is of greater importance than engaging in conflict with the Israeli establishment. Stories of Jewish

heroism and sanctifying God's name appear in the papers mainly around Jewish holidays. The other study also described representations of Jewish heroism in contrast with secular heroism, and various forms of blaming Zionism for the Holocaust, as well as uses of the Holocaust in responses to current affairs ([Klein 2004](#); [Tsfaty, 2004](#)).

Gender Representations

My quantitative and qualitative analysis of Haredi press that addresses this community's women found that the main image presented of the worthy Haredi woman is that of the dedicated mother and wife supporting her Torah-studying husband ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2002](#)). In most texts, both written and illustrated, women are portrayed in the private sphere and absent from the public sphere. This picture is not representative of the reality of Haredi women, most of whom work and serve as family breadwinners. This observation is further sustained in a study that examined the images of women presented in *Mishpahah Tovah* and *Mishpahah*, while their pages served also as a site for creating and reinforcing female solidarity ([Tsarfaty and Liran-Alper 2010](#)).

A later study found indications of both continuity and change. The continuity was evident in the intensive focus in Haredi women's papers over the years on the proper place of the Haredi woman. Changes include both technical aspects such as the design, quantity, and diversity of these publications, and in their engagement with new issues related to the role of the Haredi women, such as career and self-fulfillment ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2011a](#)).

Gender representations relating to the socialization of Haredi women and educating them in line with principles and values of female “modesty” were found in the Haredi party-affiliated newspapers. These emphasized the dangers inherent in breaching these principles as opposed to the beauty of modesty, and positioned female modesty as a foundational element in Haredi education and life ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2011b](#)). These traditional and conservative messages were traced in the Children's Supplement of *Mishpahah* as well. This supplement constructs a reality in which boys are expected to study Torah and observe its commandments, while girls are expected to be obedient and conformist. However, this publication also provides a symbolic meeting place of the two sexes, and offers a platform for their respective voices ([Liran-Alper and Tsarfaty 2013](#)). Nevertheless, a recent study based on a content analysis of 229 articles from *Mishpahah* found fresh voices of resistance to religious authorities

([Wasserman and Gabel 2019](#)).

Representations of Messianism and Group Uniqueness

Representations of redemption and messianism were examined in a range of newspapers belonging to the Habad Hasidic community, which is characterized by a notable messianic vibe ([Tsarfaty 1999](#)). These issues imply Israeli political statements, in that these newspapers voiced opposition to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995) and the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, due to a concern that these would postpone the redemption, and they presented the Israeli political Left as being removed from authentic Judaism ([Tsarfaty 2005](#)).

Ideas regarding the uniqueness of the Haredi community emerge in a variety of ways in the Haredi press. Baran found that editorials and opinion pieces in Haredi newspapers tend to reflect a mentality of living “under siege” ([Baran 1999](#)). This concept describes a situation in which the members of a particular group believe that the rest of the world is hostile toward them and seeks to harm them, a worldview that serves to clearly define the boundaries of the community ([Douglas 1966](#)). This type of isolationist attitude was reflected in the discourse used by the Haredi press after the murder of Prime Minister Rabin, which claimed that the murder was an indication of the moral decay of “them,” namely Israeli society, as opposed to “us,” the moral Haredi community ([Mass-Tsfati, 2000](#)).

Another example of this “us versus them” dynamic appears in the representation of immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Haredi press ([Yaakobi, 2012](#)). This includes over-estimations of the number of non-Jewish immigrants, according to Haredi halakhic definitions, and stories about immigrants attempting to enter Israel under false pretenses. Likewise, this worldview appeared in an examination of the coverage of Jewish festivals in the Haredi press compared to that in the general press, which concluded that Haredim reinforce their group identity during festival periods via an educating religious discourse that describes prayers in different communities, different cantors and synagogues, and the teachings and practices of leading rabbis on festivals ([Cohen 2005](#); [2016a](#)).

Historical Aspects

Several historical aspects of the Haredi press in Hebrew and Yiddish are described in detail by several scholars, spanning from 17th century *Pri Etz*

Hahaim through the great flourishing beginning the second half of the 19th century in Israel and Europe ([Caplan 2006b](#); [Gilboa 1992](#); [Neriya-Ben Shahar 2008](#); [Rothstein 1973](#); [Slipoy 1976](#)), including the place and role of leading orthodox and Haredi figures who were active in this field.⁴ Keren-Kratz described the development of the press in Maramarus and Galicia, and assigned a prominent place in this story to Hirsch Leib Gottlieb (1829-1930), who almost single-handedly wrote, typeset, printed, and published more than ten newspapers ([Keren-Kratz 2014a](#); [2014b](#); [2017](#)).

The central role of the Gur Hasidic community in Haredi press began in 1912, when its leader decided to establish a daily. Being the official voice of Agudat Israel, the changes that occurred in this movement's political-ideological platform were reflected in this venue, as well as others founded subsequently in Israel and elsewhere ([Fund 1999](#)), such as its first weekly in Jerusalem, *Kol Yisrael* ([Genihovsky 1995](#)). The first Haredi daily, *Hayoman*, the official paper of the Agudat Israel center in besieged Jerusalem, appeared in 1948–1949, and reflected the ambivalence of the Haredi community that was caught between integration into the surrounding Jewish society and its struggles against perceived threats to its way of life ([Naor 2013](#)). This Haredi publication was part of a relative flourishing of Jewish newspapers in Jerusalem during this period ([Limor and Gabel 1998](#)).

Sabbath Synagogue Pamphlets

Pamphlets are distributed in synagogues and communities toward and during the Sabbath. Even though they do not meet the definition of a “newspaper” according to the Press Regulations, they ought to be included in this chapter since they are a form of communal communication. Rappel offered an initial description of the pamphlets produced by Habad and by National Religious groups, and Zimmerman examined the trailblazer in this field, *Nerot Shabbat* ([Rappel 1991](#); [Zimmerman 1994](#)).

In general, these pamphlets are financed by donations, advertisements, and sponsorships, along with a variety of public funding sources including government ministries and political and religious organizations and movements. They provide an alternative channel for sharing opinions, and most of them include current affairs, religious, and social content ([Cohen 2000](#)). For example, they played a central tool in the struggle to impose a ban on television ([Cromer 1998](#)), deploying a rhetorical strategy that depicted multiple dichotomies:

between Haredim and secular Israelis, between Jews and non-Jews, between good and bad, and between those who watched television and those who did not.

A similar dichotomy was observed by Cohen, who saw the need for group identification and defining communal boundaries as being the main factor in the great popularity of these pamphlets in Israeli synagogues. Alienation from the secular media led to a need for alternative commentary, and thus these pamphlets developed into a small-scale and confrontational media format ([Cohen 2000](#)). Another study analyzed the language, advertisements, gender expressions, and omissions within several pamphlets, and highlighted the separation between Haredi and secular Israelis as reflected in them ([Baumel 2004](#)).

In the 1990s, more than 60 such pamphlets were counted in Israel, with differing distribution levels and various formats. The growing popularity of this media format led to a study that offered an initial and partial mapping of Sabbath pamphlets published in Israel, and identified more than 100 of them. The main explanation offered for this high number is the opportunity presented by pamphlets to reach a high level of distribution of written religious messages at a low cost. Another explanation concerns the wide variety of potential readership, young and old, men and women, representing a range of ethnic and religious communal identities. In addition, this study describes the developments in the format, structure, and content of these pamphlets as well as voluntary methods of distribution, synagogues that refuse to hand out issues that run counter to their worldviews and values, and the compilation of pamphlets into books ([Caplan 2006a](#)).

Advertisements

Advertisements targeting the Haredi public appear in a range of media: internet, radio, billboards and posters, and newspapers. But studies on this topic focused thus far solely on newspaper advertising, which is the reason for addressing this aspect in this section.

[Zak-Teller \(2003\)](#) claimed that advertisements in Haredi papers differentiate between the average Haredi consumer, who belongs to an overall framework of conservative behavior, and the individual Haredi who makes purchasing decisions based on personal needs and considerations. Adverts targeting general Haredim use Haredi values and sources of authority, while adverts targeting individual Haredim use secular and individualistic values. She also found that

censorship in Haredi advertising includes issues of modesty, for example ruling out adverts for products for couples' love lives, as well as “impure” animals, and pictorial representations of gluttony.

[Tsarfaty and Ze'evi \(2012\)](#), who explored the rhetoric of advertisements in the Haredi press from 1998 to 2008, claim that they express the tension between the traditional stance of conservatism and isolationism, and a more modern stance of openness to the influences of secularism and modernity. They found that alongside use of religious symbols and quotations and consistent exclusion of pictures of women, adverts also included secular products, messages, and representations extolling the pleasures of life.

Cohen ([2012c](#); [2016a](#)) examined advertisements connected to the Jewish holidays published in Haredi, national religious, and secular newspapers between 2009 and 2010. He found that while the Haredi and national religious press' commercials focused on traditional aspects of the holidays, the secular newspapers addressed their consumerism aspects.

Wall Posters (Pashkevilim)

Wall posters are a communication method that is uniquely identified with Haredi society. Their expressions of heterogeneity, cries for attention, anarchic character, and short life span make them highly suitable to the Haredi community ([Friedman 2005](#)). They are a cultural and entertainment mainstay of the community, which sanctifies the written word ([Arieli, 2005](#)). The main subjects that appear in these posters are guarding the purity of Haredi education, self-differentiation from the surrounding Zionist society and from other Haredi groups, internal Haredi rivalries and tensions, and the sanctity of the Sabbath. These topics have maintained their centrality since the early 1900s ([Baharoz-Baroz 2005a](#); [2005b](#); [2005c](#); [2005d](#); [2005e](#); [2005f](#); [2005g](#)). Their historical roots date to the early 18th century, when European Jews began to use them in internal Jewish communal rivalries, and from the 19th century Hasidic leaders and others made use of them ([Keren-Kratz 2013](#)).

Wall posters have unique linguistic characteristics which include abbreviations, use of Jewish classic sources, and quirks of language ([Muchnik and Cantor, 2004](#); [Shapira 2005](#)). They also represent social-gender differences, expressed via linguistic differences. For example, there are many honorific terms and titles used when giving the names of men, but hardly any used when referring to women ([Muchnik and Cantor 2000](#)). Related in part, another study

looked at their comic and humoristic aspects, and suggested viewing them as challenging the social-religious-information genre and its cultural implications ([Rosenberg 2016](#)).

Rosenberg and Rashi ([2014](#); [2015](#)) examined a case study of two dominant and contrasting media forms which are both integral to Haredi living: wall posters and cellular phones. They found that the former is used to fight against the latter, which in some quarters is considered a threat to Haredi values. In addition, they found that these posters sought to create a climate of public mobilization, presenting themselves as “bottom-up” protests against transgressors, whereas newspapers provided “top-down” coverage of the debates over smartphones in kashrut committees, published formal halakhic rulings, and encouraged the imposition of social ostracization against smartphone users.

Haredi Print Media – Message Originators

According to Lasswell's model, the originators are those who create the message, and in this case, they are Haredi print journalists. [Blitz \(2003\)](#) explored the writing and worldviews of female Haredi journalists and found that they experience a constant personal-halakhic conflict because their entry into the professional field of journalism was not usually the result of a desire to work in the media, but rather of a need to make money and support their families. Another finding related to their willingness or need to conceal the nature of their work: most use pen names, and 80% of those who do so have more than one pen name.

Haredi Print Media – Target Audience

The author of this article examined the patterns of exposure of Haredi women to the Haredi press, the profiles of women who read different papers, and the relation between demographic variables and the readership of the Haredi press. She found that their patterns of consumption of Haredi newspapers provide them with a tool for developing a complex personal, familial, and communal definition, and that the process of consumption is accompanied by a complex mechanism of filtering and sorting texts ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2008](#); [2012](#)).

These studies also highlighted another main characteristic of the consumption of Haredi newspapers: “Chain reading.” This refers to the accepted practice of passing on newspapers, as well as books, audiotape cassettes, and CDs, which may be done in a social network chain, or via charitable non-profits. This form

of sharing can be likened to the “share” function found in online social media platforms. For example, there are apartment buildings in which every three months a different family will pay for a subscription to *Mishpahah*, and this paper is then passed on to the other families in the building. There are some families that buy *Mishpahah* and then hand it on to their relatives, according to their age or to the days on which they come to visit.

As with sharing over social media, here too there is an aspect of exposure and supervision. Presumably, people share media and content which they consider to be legitimate, though they may also share non-legitimate content and media in small groups. For example, interviewees spoke of secret groups of Haredi women who pass around romantic novels.

An examination of the reading methods employed by Haredi women for texts published in Haredi newspapers, compared with the methods used by men reading the same texts, found that Haredi women deploy a variety of different methods. They also have a way of reading that is not referred to in the theoretical literature, which can be defined as “super-dominant reading.” The men's reading of the texts tends to be critical and argumentative. For both men and women, the attempt to uncover the true identity of the writer of the text is a central part of their reading strategy ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2008; 2015](#)).

While this review indicates a highly diverse range of studies on Haredi print media, we still lack a single public survey examining attitudes, opinions, and consumption patterns among men and women regarding Sabbath pamphlets, advertisements, and wall posters, or the attitudes, opinions, and consumption patterns of men regarding newspapers. Likewise, as mentioned, there is no study that examines the effect of these media, and given their centrality it is a notable lacuna.

Audio Media

Audiotape Cassettes: Characteristics, Originators, Genres, and Content

The first scholarly acknowledgment of audiotape cassettes as a central and significant medium in Haredi society, published in 1993, described the characteristics of this oral medium, the use of spoken media, the possibility for repeated use via cassettes, and the ability of intra-communal media to allow for internal criticism. The genres spanned by Haredi audio cassettes were, and remain, many and varied in content, including children's stories, guidance and

instruction for women, the weekly Torah portion, Torah classes, sermons, conferences, and current events ([Blondheim and Caplan 1993](#); [Goodman and Bilu 2003](#)).

Caplan further reviewed the development of spoken and recorded audio culture in the Haredi sector. He explained the rising popularity of cassettes from an economic perspective, based on the low costs of producing and distributing them and on the existence of dedicated free lending libraries, and from a technical perspective, in that they allow consumers to listen to them while engaging in other tasks. These studies also indicated gender-related changes, such as the emergence of women preachers and men who preach to women audiences ([Caplan 1997](#)). In terms of content, they expressed issues of concern to Haredi society, such as relations with the secular world and the large-scale entry of women to the world of work. These cassettes are rich in rhetorical use of associative imagery for intra-communal themes and figures, and include internal criticism, based on the presumption that they themselves are an entirely intra-communal form of discourse ([Caplan 2000](#)).

Amran argued that the cassette industry makes it possible to better understand trends and processes of change within Haredi society and in its relations with mainstream Israeli society. It reflects aspects of modernization processes and establishmentarianism, Haredi leisure culture, gender roles, and relations between religious and secular ([Amran 1995](#); [2008](#); [2015](#)). Caplan presented the cassette industry as an indicator of Haredi attitudes toward modern technology and its uses. Like other fundamentalist groups, the Haredim also take a pragmatic approach, on the one hand rejecting the foundations of science and modernity that made the development of electronic devices possible, while on the other hand making their own use of these devices themselves ([Caplan 2007](#)). This approach views the tool as neutral; the question is one of use and content. Cassettes facilitate a religious experience of identifying with the speaker without being in his or her presence and make it possible to replicate a social experience in other places and times. The pragmatic Haredi approach to technology was also evident in the transition to CDs and MP3 players, and in various social issues that accompanied this transition ([Amran 2015](#)).

Another issue is that of the target audience. This author examined the listening habits of Haredi women, and the link between socio-demographic variables and listening patterns ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2008](#)), and Leon studied the cassettes used to disseminate the messages of the Shas movement during the period prior to the 1999 elections ([Leon 2011](#); [2012](#)). He classifies them as an alternative form of

media that can be used to understand the fundamentalist political culture of Shas in those years. He argues that not only are cassettes a cheap, effective, and monologue-only form of communication, but that in McLuhan's terms the cassette itself is the message. To this effect, there are similarities with the genre of cassettes of Mizrahi singers which challenged the Ashkenazi hegemony of Israeli music, and the genre of proselytizing cassettes calling on Jews to adopt a religious lifestyle. Similarly, the responses of interviewees to the video *J'Accuse*, a defense of Haredi Shas politician Aryeh Deri, who was indicted in 1999 for bribery, indicate a conscious attempt by the Mizrahi community to challenge the Ashkenazi media, cultural, and political hegemony.

On a comparative note, Fader studied live and recorded lectures that were distributed on cassettes and later on CDs, targeting Haredi women in Brooklyn. These lectures spoke about the crisis of faith affecting the religious community, for which they blamed the internet. The women who were interviewed in the study explained that being consumers of these cassettes marked them as consumers of the most kosher medium available, which least threatens the integrity of the community ([Fader 2013](#)).

Radio

According to the 2020 TGI survey of Haredi media,⁵ Radio *Kol Hai* had a listener share of 27.7%, and Radio *Kol Baramah* 15.4%. These two Haredi radio stations belong to the regional radio sector in Israel and are regulated by the Second Broadcasting Authority ([Mann 2016](#)), after many years during which Haredi radio stations were mainly pirate stations ([Cohen 2004](#); [2012a](#); [Limor 1996](#); [Limor and Naveh 2007](#)). [Neriya-Ben Shahar \(2008\)](#) studied the radio listening habits of Haredi women, and the links between socio-demographic variables, media consumption patterns, and radio listening habits. Approximately 43% of the women responded that they listen mainly to Haredi radio stations. Others addressed their opposition to the radio and claimed that they did not want this device in their home, even though the Haredi stations suggest censored news and religious classes.

[Cohen \(2019\)](#) described the attempts to find a solution to the conflict in which Radio *Kol Baramah*, which does not allow women's voices to be broadcast and thus sued by the *Kolekh* women's rights organization. Overall, it appears as though Haredi attempts to impose an embargo on secular radio listening have been less effective than in the case of television, mainly because Israel's security

situation has made it almost *de rigueur* for citizens to follow regular radio news updates ([Cohen 2013b](#)).

Audio-Visual Media

Cinema

Vered Ba-Gad Elimelech examined the ways in which Haredi values and norms are reflected in movies produced and distributed on CDs in the Haredi sector from 2000 onward. A content analysis of 80 movies found that at the beginning, Haredi cinema was concerned with transmitting content that accorded with rabbinical ideology, but that it subsequently gained sufficient cultural and ideological power to be able to also explore social relations and political problems. All the movies studied serve as expressions of Judaism and religiousness and indicate the application of strict censorship. For example, women and girls appear only in movies for young children, and there is no place for any questioning of faith, apostasy, or unclean language. Likewise, there are no representations of conflict within the Haredi community, such as ethnic or inter-group tensions ([Ba-Gad Elimelech 2009](#); [Elimelech 2012](#)). Nevertheless, there is opposition within the community to viewing these movies, as well as to video games designed for Haredi children ([Tsarfaty and Blais 2002](#)).

Marlyn Venig situates Haredi cinema as a social phenomenon and describes the processes by which these movies are made and distributed in Haredi society, paying special attention to the Israeli social and historical context, as well as describing their content and structure ([Venig, 2011](#)). Matan Aharoni offers a broad examination of these movies' originators, their messages, and target audiences of Haredi cinema. Combining ethnographic tools and a series of interviews with filmmakers, he explored how they deal with religious limitations, and how "kosher" films for women are produced. He found that the filmmakers, a new professional community of Haredi men and women, use a range of cinematic strategies to emotionally challenge their audiences and engage them in active viewing, while also strengthening their religious feelings. They deploy techniques of "cinematic overload" in terms of both content and aesthetics, combining entertainment with religious messages, and creating movies that are melodramatic. The marketing of Haredi movies includes elements of preparing the viewers for these powerful emotional experiences. Research observations of screening events revealed that these are experiential

happenings, which Aharoni coins “carefully supervised audio-visual carnivals” ([Aharoni 2014](#); [2015](#); [2016](#)). This has resulted in an active, creative, and engaging form of Haredi leisure culture ([Lyush 2015](#)).

A semiotic analysis of the adverts for these movies and of some of the movies themselves was used to analyze the message content. This found that Haredi cinema challenges the internal divisions in Haredi society and examines intra-societal boundaries. Cinema operates as a cultural mediator that allows Haredi viewers to be exposed, under the filmmakers' supervision, to “alien” themes and to new combinations of traditional and modern ideas. In this sense, cinema represents a form of “mediating openness” that links between tradition and modernity.

Representations of men in Haredi cinema were examined using modeling analysis of the different kinds of masculinity shown in the work of the filmmaker Avi Greenberg ([Benite 2013](#)) and in the Jewish Revenge series of action movies made by Groweiss ([Friedman and Hakak 2015](#)). These studies revealed how the National-Zionist narrative and the imagined place of Haredim within it are redesigned in these movies, reflecting growing Haredi engagement with Israeli culture, secular society, and the military and defense establishment. Similar to the findings of [Stadler \(2004\)](#), the movies show that young Haredi males are keen to serve in the IDF. Aharoni examined representations of Haredi men who are not members of the Haredi-Lithuanian “society of learners,” and who thus contravene the ideal image of the Haredi male. He found that the focus on Haredi men who work for a living showed a difference from the social image of a critical attitude toward men who do not study Torah full time. The members of the Haredi middle classes function as threshold agents, marking the boundaries of Haredi society, while members of the lower classes function as uncompromising agents of morality and justice ([Aharoni 2016](#)).

Television

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no Haredi television and that, overall, it is banned from use in Haredi society, several studies are devoted to television in Haredi society. The first study appeared two decades after television broadcasts began in Israel, and focused on *pashkevilim* that led the struggle against television viewing ([Cromer 1987](#)). It exposes the images of the television as a source of impurity, as one of the evils of the 20th century, and as an infectious disease. Noteworthy is the fact that this approach would find support in certain

approaches regarding the negative consequences of watching television in academic studies, such as one that documented a difference in sleeping patterns between Haredi and secular teenagers. The author concluded that Haredi teenagers fell asleep faster and woke up earlier, suffered less from drowsiness, behavioral disorders, and mood swings, and spent more time on homework than secular teenagers ([Vidal 2014](#)).

The campaign against television had four stages: (1) preventing exposure by demonstrations and threats; (2) punishing and social ostracization; (3) utilizing scholarly findings in order to persuade potential users regarding the negative effects on of viewing sex and violence on children; and (4) public confessions and promises for future behavior. Subsequently, the Haredi community's embargo on television lasted many years ([Cohen 2012a](#); [2013c](#); [2013d](#)).

This author asked Haredi women whether they watched television, and 3% responded positively ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2008](#)). A comparative study of attitudes and opinions regarding television among Haredi and Amish women found that women in both communities perceive television as delivering negative content that is opposed to their respective communities' values, and that they consider the medium itself to be a moral and social threat. The women presented television as a dangerous tool with a negative influence on human beings' mental, emotional, and moral states. Clearly, refraining from television viewing is an important and significant part of the self-definition of women in both these communities ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2017b](#)).

However, following the use of internet in Haredi society, studying the television would be seemingly redundant, since recent technological advancements enable viewing almost all televisual content online and this development has made the Haredi struggle against television rather futile.

New Media

Internet

According to [Cahaner and Malach \(2021\)](#), based on the Central Bureau of Statistics, 64% of Haredim report that they use the internet, compared with 93% of the general Jewish population. Approximately 62% use mostly a computer for internet use, and 36% use mostly a phone. Almost 88% of Haredim use email services, 73% search for information compared to 94% of the general Jewish population, 62% use banking websites, 58% use the internet for work, and 56%

for government services. About 50% report accessing social media networks, compared with 98% in the general Jewish population. Nearly 46% use WhatsApp compared to 97% in the general Jewish population. Almost 36% report using it to make payments or shop, compared with 53% in the general Jewish population. Around 10% use the internet for gaming while 36% in the general Jewish population do so.

The COVID-19 virus led to higher use of new media in the Haredi community ([Friedman 2021](#)), despite the leaders' directions ([Cohen 2021](#); [Rosenberg and Blondheim 2021a](#)). According to data provided by the Bezek Communications company, the surfing size within Haredi neighborhoods rose from 40% to 50% in the first months of the pandemic.⁶

Based upon this brief data, we can continue to review the extensive academic research on Haredim and the internet, and then attempt to answer the question that has bothered many researchers: What is the relationship between Haredim and the internet?

The Relationship between Haredim and the Internet

Neri Horowitz's "The Haredim and the Internet" is, to the best of my knowledge, the first academic study on this topic. He described the internet as a threat to the "society of learners" in that it facilitates exposure to the surrounding environment at a high level of intimacy. It crosses geographical and social boundaries and leads to a loss of social supervision. The internet makes forbidden communication possible and enables access to pornographic content and other forbidden texts. Horowitz also points to the differences between American Haredim, who have become used to working outside of Haredi society and to dealing with external stimulation, and Israeli Haredim who are part of the "society of learners," and therefore are exposed much later, if at all, to the general labor market. Thus, the groups considered to be at risk in Israeli Haredi society include not just children and youth, but also adults ([Horowitz 2000](#)).

The response of the Haredi community has been a desperate attempt to shore up its fortifications, and to impose bans and embargos. But, as pointed out, banning and intimidating relate to certain groups while in others there are various patterns of internet use. On one side are the relatively open groups such as Habad, Shas, Rachlin, and Breslav, as well as other proselytizing groups that use various technologies to attract followers. These groups allow internet use for both intra- and extra-communal communication and for disseminating religious

messages. On the other side are Haredi groups that allow a certain degree of internet use, but only for purposes of making a living. As in the case of television described above, Haredim identify the medium with its content. They posit that Haredi leaders do not have faith in their followers' moral fortitude, and fear that they will be unable to resist the temptations of the internet ([Tsarfaty and Blais 2002](#)). A different approach stems from a study of data on users of the online social network platform *Hevrah* who defined themselves as Haredi, based upon which the authors defined four dimensions of religious extremism, and the relation of each to the internet: hierarchy, patriarchy, discipline, and monasticism ([Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai 2005](#)).

Heidi Campbell described Haredi websites that also serve the secular public and noted the scarcity of research on this topic, thus paving the way for a new generation of researchers who focused on this issue ([Campbell 2006](#)). In her subsequent book she examined the responses of various Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious communities to new media. Among the Jews, she examined how Haredi communities manage their relations with new media, including the developments of “kosher” internet and cellphones. She proposes a theoretical and empiric framework for viewing the complex relations between religion and new media, and developed a model for analyzing the religio-social design of new technologies, comprising four key areas that require attention: (1) the history and tradition of religion; (2) the values and priorities of the contemporary community; (3) communal negotiations over innovations and technologies; and (4) communal discourse justifying the use of technology. Campbell posits that the redesigning of technology within a particular community of users is influenced by the users' ability to adapt the technology to their moral economy. When new media are aligned with the goals and core values of the community, and/or when they facilitate the community's agenda and the propagation of its beliefs, then they are easily approved, as, for example, was the case with the internet and Habad ([Campbell 2010](#)).

The complex relationship between religious communities and new media leads to a variety of Haredi negotiations with the internet ([Campbell 2011](#); [2013](#); [2015a](#); [2015b](#)), which poses a potential threat to social and religious norms ([Blondheim 2015](#)) and to the accepted authority structures ([Lovheim and Campbell 2017](#)). The central reasons for the opposition of communal leaders to internet use are the easy access it provides to pornography and other forbidden content, and its facilitation of forbidden relations between men and women, such as via Facebook, as well as of gossip and slander ([Cohen 2011a](#); [2012a](#); [2013c](#);

[2013d](#)).

The technological solutions that have developed in the form of “filtered” and/or “kosher” internet service provision, do not fully resolve the problems of access, because even with “kosher” internet packages it has been possible to view “non-kosher” sites ([Cohen 2013d](#); [Katz 2012](#)). Thus, in the Haredi educational system in Brooklyn concerns over home internet use led to demands that parents sign a declaration that their children do not have internet access at home ([Fader 2013](#)).

Despite these efforts, it seems as though the rabbinical monopoly and control mechanisms are less effective with new media. In contrast with their success with the struggles against television and secular newspapers, and the partial success against secular radio, many Haredim now use the internet in spite of rabbinical bans. They are not always strict in differentiating between legitimate use for work purposes and forbidden use at home ([Cohen 2015a](#)). For example, [Lissitsa and Roth-Cohen \(2018\)](#) found that the Haredi community rate of online shopping was higher than other religious groups.

Messages

Haredi websites can be sorted into five categories: (1) sites disseminating religious content and reporting on religious activities, such as those of Habad, [Shturem.Net](#), and *Hidabroot*; (2) commercial sites, such as *Telenofesh* and *Business*; (3) news sites with strict censorial restrictions, such as *JDN*; (4) news sites based on Haredi radio stations, such as *Kol Hai* and *Kol Baramah*; and (5) news sites that are similar to general news websites, the most popular being *Kikar Hashabat* and *Behadrei Haredim* ([Mann 2016](#)).

The design of these websites is not very different from that of secular websites. Their content includes much visuals, soft gossip, and issues on the public agenda, such as the debate over Haredi conscription. In recent years, Haredi websites begun to report on instances of sexual violence within the Haredi community, though these are obliquely referred to as “serious acts.” *Behadrei Haredim* includes a women's zone called *Nashim*, and *Kikar Hashabat* has a similar section called *Mame*.

Research into the messages contained in Haredi websites has focused mainly on community-based content and virtual communities. Tydor-Baumel-Schwartz argued that it is possible to learn about the changing lives and culture of Haredi and other religious women via analysis of the content that appears in their

forums. She found extensive discussion of subjects generally considered taboo, such as emotional and technical aspects of the female body, sexuality and sexual purity, and halakhah and ceremonies ([Tydor-Baumel-Schwartz 2009](#)). Lieber analyzed blogs of American Haredi and religious women and observed the creation of a new type of “private-public” space, simultaneously facilitating an expansion of private space and entry into a public space, while minimizing the risks involved. The women who post on the forums found an opportunity for self-expression under cover of privacy, without compromising their social or religious boundaries. According to Lieber, these women's posts include feminist implications, in that they challenge important aspects of traditional gender roles ([Lieber 2010](#)).

Pearl examined the relations between the Habad Hasidic community and new media via content analysis of this community's main websites. She found that these sites serve as a space for disseminating information and for proselytizing, more than for creating virtual community. The sites encourage users to connect with charismatic rabbis and to build personal and unmediated relationships with them. Like other studies on Habad, Pearl found that not only has the community not embargoed the internet, but it has in fact adopted it and uses it extensively ([Pearl 2014](#)).

Okun viewed Haredi internet users as an online religious community. She analyzed content in the most popular Israeli Haredi web forum site, *Behadrei Haredim*, looking at the users' discussion topics, interactions, dynamics, and identity games. Her findings show that the forum serves as an intermediary space for discussion of both holy and everyday topics, including current affairs, leisure, internal and external politics, health, and technology. Community members use the forums intensively, and interactions between members were observed that were almost synchronous, including at unusual hours such as the middle of the night and close to the beginning of the Sabbath. This study also revealed personal and emotional dynamics, sharing of personal information, and mutual criticism. Users' anonymity enables them to engage in identity games, playing with their gender, personal, and group identities. Okun described the online Haredi community as a “new Haredi court” with an active social and cultural life. This created a hybrid space of living online religiousness, functioning as a social space for dealing with both secular and religious issues, expressing a diverse range of opinions, and anonymous play ([Okun 2016](#); [Okun and Nimrod 2017](#)).

Finally, an examination of representations of Jewish holidays in the *Behadrei*

Haredim website reveals extensive descriptions of rabbinical figures in holiday settings, updates on prayer times, and holiday-related news coverage, such as children being injured while helping to build a tabernacle (*sukah*), or permissions granted to enter the United States with a palm branch (*lulav*) despite given strict regulations against bringing in agricultural produce ([Cohen 2016b](#); [2017b](#); [2017c](#)).

Audience

Haredi women have adopted some complex discourse strategies in order to legitimize their internet use. Interviews with five Haredi women who use the internet revealed that discourse about technology is no less important than the practices of use ([Livio and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2007](#)). The ambivalence expressed by these women is evident, and it reappears throughout subsequent studies on this topic ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2019](#); [2020b](#)). The women described in detail the dangers versus the opportunities posed by the internet. On the one hand, they view it as a threat to Haredi society, and on the other hand, as a source for information, learning, employment, and pleasure, as well as a space for self-expression and participation in virtual communities. The women's strategies included differentiation between the self and the group, between different groups that make up Haredi society, and between native-born Haredim and those who chose to join the folds. They also emphasized that their behavior has no political meaning, but rather is a form of non-critical individual activity.

Campbell also asserted that Haredi and other religious interviewees differentiated between various religious and ethnic groups, while emphasizing shared religiousness based on strict beliefs and practices. When describing their complex relationship with the internet, the interviewees placed greater weight on communal concepts and communal identification rather than on authoritative figures in the community. They explained the non-use or limited use of the internet with statements such as “religious [Jews] aren't allowed” to use it, and “the Haredi community says” ([Campbell 2007b](#)).

Katz interviewed Haredi families from northern Israel who use the internet and found an ambivalent attitude containing a combination of dual categories: possibility/danger, choice/coercion, alienation/personal relationships, work/home, technology/content, religious/secular, women/men, commanding leadership/directional leadership, and ideals/actions. These internet users coped with their religious dilemmas using reasoning and justification that encompassed

the personal such as the user can avoid the dangers, the practical, for example, the internet as a source of income and information, and the technological namely that the internet is a neutral tool that is separate from its problematic content ([Katz 2007](#)).

Another study examined the attitudes and views of members of closed online forums for Haredi women. Echoing the ambivalence described above, the findings indicate that the users view the internet as an important and significant medium that supports empowerment and the development of diverse relationships, but also as a threat to the Haredi way of life. They consider the restrictions on internet use to be both communal, referencing the need for permission from rabbis to use the internet for work, and familial such as sharing details of their internet usage habits with their spouses but not their friends ([Lev-On and Neriya-Ben Shahar 2011](#)).

The attitudes and views of Haredi women who work in computerized environments also reveal similar patterns of rejection and adoption. Two-thirds of them reported that they have a computer at home, and half of them that they have home internet connection. Approximately one-third of all women surveyed create new relationships via the internet, mainly with other women. The women view the internet as an important and meaningful tool in their lives, but simultaneously express conservative religious views, based on the established religious worldviews of rabbinical authorities. The women view the internet as a tool that endangers Haredi society and threatens its boundaries. An examination of socioeconomic variables reveals a link between ideological and behavioral openness toward the internet, for example women's level of education or their husbands' employment ([Neriya-Ben Shahar and Lev-On 2011](#); [2013](#)).

The findings of this study also indicate a sizable gap between the strength of the interviewees' belief that the internet might weaken the religiosity of Haredi society and that the internet weakens their own religiosity. This indicates a third-person effect, in which there is a gap between the sense of threat to others and the sense of threat to oneself. Thus, the women view the internet as more dangerous to others than to themselves ([Lev-On and Neriya-Ben Shahar 2011](#)).

A comparison between the views and use of internet of Amish women and Haredi women revealed that in both groups, discourse about the internet is based on themes of danger and threat. Both view the internet as a medium that is opposed to their community's values and practices, whereas only a minority of the Amish women use the internet, as opposed to many Haredi women. The women function as both agents of change and gatekeepers, and their self-control

regarding internet use can increase their social and religious capital ([Neriya-Ben Shahr 2017a; 2021a](#)).

Social Media

As mentioned above, 50% of Haredim use social media ([Cahaner and Malach 2021](#)), and the other half of them provide vital explanations for why they do not use it ([Kay and Levine 2019](#)). Nevertheless, many users limit their use and strictly choose their social connections and contacts. For example, [Lev-On and Lissitsa \(2018\)](#) found that Haredi social media users focused mainly on the professional benefits of digital social media, compared to the social needs of secular and Modern Orthodox Jews.

Like the surrounding Israeli society, one of the most popular social media apps within the Haredi community is WhatsApp. [Abramac \(2015\)](#) described the unique uses of WhatsApp among Haredim, and [Mishol-Shauli and Golan \(2019\)](#) analyzed 2000 WhatsApp posts and conducted 20 interviews with Haredi WhatsApp's users. They showed how the users reconstruct and renegotiate the community's boundaries through the uses.

Communicator

Haredi and religious internet entrepreneurs and website managers face various challenges relating to the combination of using the internet and their communal-traditional identity. Entrepreneurs and managers described a complex negotiation over societal control, sources of authority, and communal boundaries with their offline communities. They explained that there are religious authorities who promote regulated and controlled internet use rather than boycotting mechanisms. They recognize the ability of the internet to serve as a platform for promoting a “digital enclave” and for managing a separate religious identity. There is an intensive process for admitting users to online forums, aiming to maintain the community's boundaries. Applicants are asked specific questions, such as the names of the rabbis of certain groups, or halakhic questions, which enable to preserve the privacy of the communal public space. In other words, via digital technology website managers have an essential liminal role between the religious and the secular, the traditional and the modern ([Campbell and Golan 2011](#)).

Golan sought to understand the role played by the internet in adapting the boundaries of religious identification. By means of a combination of in-depth

interviews with Haredi and religious website managers in Israel and the United States, content analysis, and ethnographic observation of websites, he found that the internet functions as a medium for reconstructing religious identification, according to the website managers' agency and the dynamics of the medium. There are sites that create combined identities, such as those for both Hasidic and Lithuanian Haredim, and others that create separated identities, such as Habad websites ([Golan 2011](#)).

Indeed, Habad is unique in this context. Its members are actively engaged in expanding the community and proselytizing, and it has a history of using modern technology to spread the word ([Tsarfaty and Blais 2002](#)). A triangulation of observations, interviews, and content analysis shows that Habad uses goal-oriented legitimation, and its members promote metaphysical goals via new media. They combine strategies for promoting solidarity within their communities and strengthening views of Judaism. It is a case of a fundamentalist society strengthening its relationship with new media, which highlights the tension between modernity and religious devoutness. Habad websites serve as the outward face of the community, as a space within its borders, and as a place for social participation. There is tension between protecting the enclave and accepting other groups into it. Among other strategies, there is a distinction made between sites for internal communal use of promoting group solidarity, and sites designed to attract newcomers which support communal and religious growth beyond symbolic boundaries ([Golan 2013](#); [Golan and Stadler 2016](#)). This growth is further described in a study based upon in-depth interviews with site administrators and observations of Habad websites, that shows how the sites influence the public agenda ([Rashi and McCombs 2015](#)).

Another organization that focuses on proselytizing is *Aish Hatorah*. In order to attain its proselytizing goals, it tries to sanctify the internet and to bring the world of Torah closer to the digital world. Internet use is framed within this context as a neutral tool that can be utilized for good or bad. The staff of *Aish Hatorah* are aware of the negative potential and negotiate over how to defend the community from possible dangers by means of restrictions and filters. Instead of labelling the internet as bad, they prefer to use it as a tool to bring Torah into the world. The framing of their work as proselytizing and recruiting new friends allows them to negotiate with uses of the internet in the broader Orthodox community. The goal is to bring unaffiliated Jews into the religious fold, and online connections are utilized to create links with the offline community ([Campbell and Bellar 2015](#)).

In contrast, other Haredi groups hold simultaneous opposing beliefs toward the internet that encompass rejection and acceptance, adoption and restriction. With the exception of Habad, Haredi leaders oppose internet use, while leaving the option open in certain cases and by doing so clarifying that this is a secular activity. This approach emphasizes the use of filters and restrictions on new media, while recognizing their instrumental advantages. Entrepreneurs who belong to these groups create “digital enclaves” that address the direct opposition of the rabbis, and thus an establishment-friendly way to cope with the changing world, rather than facing dissonance or crisis ([Golan 2015](#)).

Golan and Campbell found three unique strategies used by administrators of websites that characterize closed Haredi and religious communities: Control, division into echelons, and leading. The sites studied were *Behadrei Haredim* and *Kugel* (the latter has since shut down).

1. Control is exercised in three ways:

- a. Content: Administrators review the site content and filter out secular sources of news, in order to keep out unwanted content such as pornography or unaccepted representations of women.
- b. User Access: Administrators check users' communal membership and religious identity.
- c. User Discourse: Administrators control public discussion on the site, including by actively intervening, and closing forums or discussion topics that are perceived as threatening or unacceptable.

2. Division into echelons is performed according to restrictions designed for the different groups in Haredi society. The administrators carefully filter the information that comes in from outside, and the information shared within each discussion group. Thus, the users are given a safe social space that protects them from the threat of the internet while also allowing open discussion among them and facilitating solidarity.

3. Leading is expressed in their moderation of the discussion, the content, the user experience, and the environment provided, in order to attract traffic to the site while simultaneously protecting the moral boundaries and social practices of the community ([Golan and Campbell 2015](#)).

Mishol-Shauli explored how Haredi internet journalists shape the informal

Haredi field of knowledge by conducting in-depth interviews with active online journalists, conversations with key figures, and following public WhatsApp groups of Haredi media figures and public figures. His findings indicate three key areas in which these journalists shape the conceptual approach and the implementation of Haredi online news media:

1. Negotiation over the way in which the characteristics of the journalistic profession are realized, compared with the accepted journalistic model in democratic Western countries.
2. Continued Comparison with Two Opposing Journalistic Traditions: The Haredi print media and the mainstream press in Israel. They attempt to combine advantages from both these sources but are aware of the ethical difficulties and institutional barriers of their work, which stem from these sources.
3. Haredi Culture: The ambivalent attitude of the leadership toward online news media, and the influence of this attitude on the social standing of the journalists themselves.

Using these three arenas, Haredi online journalists position themselves as having a unique ability to answer the demands of many in the community who are looking for news that the leadership forbids being accessed via mainstream media. Haredim prefer not to access external media, but they may end up doing so. On the one hand, Haredi online journalists express change processes, but on the other hand they reflect obedience to the leadership. Some of them write under pen names, while others feel that writing under their own names strengthens their status ([Golan and Mishol-Shauli 2018](#); [Mishol-Shauli 2016](#)).

Cellphones and Smartphones

According to a survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute (Neriya-Ben Shahar forthcoming), 65% of Haredim own a kosher phone, 12% have a kosher smartphone, and 13% use a regular smartphone. Around 9% have two phones, one kosher and one smartphone. Noteworthy is the fact that the survey did not differentiate between kosher and regular smartphones.

While Haredi society easily adopted the landline telephone, cellular phones presented new challenges. Even first-generation phones, which did not support SMS, had no video capabilities or internet access, still enabled free

communication outside of the home. The ability to speak freely without oversight, to hear women speaking on the phone in public places, and to listen to unsupervised content over the phone, was a danger to the integrity of the community.

However, advanced phones with SMS and various content constituted a real danger. In response, Haredi representatives in cooperation with the Mirs company developed a “kosher” cellphone, embodying a special form of negotiation between religious users and a commercial company. The ability to create cultural adaptations according to specific religious requirements is more than just a question of a company providing customer service; it represents a relationship between religious beliefs and technological development. As against the option of opposing innovation based on the fear of harm to core values, there is also an option of development and adaptation, in which technologies, and even the discourse about technological negotiations, are adapted to the special needs of the community ([Campbell 2007a](#)).

Additional information based upon questionnaires distributed to Haredi yeshiva students regarding this topic found a broad range of opinions about rabbinical restrictions on cellphone use. About 20% said that there are no restrictions, 49% that there are some restrictions, and 28% stated that using a cellphone is entirely forbidden. In response to a question about specific restrictions, the students gave different responses: They claimed that rabbis forbade downloading from the internet, as well as sending and receiving pictures, sending texts, playing games, and downloading ringtones, and placed restrictions on who can be called and how long the discussion should be. A central explanation supplied for these restrictions is that Haredim are supposed to devote their time to Torah study, and thus using a phone constitutes wasting Torah-study time. The main insight of this study is that Haredim make their own adjustments to the restrictions placed on using modern communications technology. One example is the creation of a double code of behavior, using technology clandestinely while meeting expectations by not using phones in the public eye (Cohen, Lemish, and Schechter 2008).

Nethaniel Deutsch posited that internet connections, messaging apps, and cameras made the cellphone into a pocket-sized portal to the outside world, leaving the individual open to its influences. He conducted an ethnographic study in Hasidic neighborhoods in Brooklyn, as well as a comparative content analysis of a range of Haredi media in Israel and the United States. He found that while in Israel it is common for Haredim to use phones with a “kosher”

certification, despite this meaning a step backward in technological terms to phones that can only make and receive voice calls, many Haredim in the United States own a “non-kosher” smartphone.

Among the many strategies used to enforce limits, Deutsch includes setting high rates for calls to non-kosher phones and for caller ID on kosher phones. Thus, they create both financial and social oversight tools. In addition, the campaign against cellphones used a strategy combining wall posters and adverts in the Haredi press, including controversial adverts referring to “the cellphone Holocaust.” Another strategy, familiar from the struggles against television and the internet, is to demand that school students and parents use only kosher phones, and not to admit children whose parents have a smartphone. Thus, parents are required to sign a declaration to this effect, which is significantly different from previous such declarations. Whereas in the past parents confirmed that they owned a kosher phone, now they must also declare that they do not own a non-kosher phone. This is due to the aforementioned rising number of Haredim who own two devices, one of them being non-kosher ([Deutsch 2009](#)).

The dual-device phenomenon is well documented. “I can use it when I’m with you,” I was told by a relative who took a kosher phone from one pocket and a smartphone from another. Campbell explained this phenomenon in terms of the many technical problems that affect kosher phones. However, she also viewed the kosher phone as an example of the ability to implement religious design in new media. She described the threat posed by the connection to the secular world and the threat to modesty, and the successful boycott of television. According to Campbell, Haredim erect borders around technologies not only so as to protect the Torah, but also for social and communal reasons: The external marking of the kosher phone is an expression of communal belonging, and facilitates control over community members. Today, however, it seems as though the greater the number of features and advantages offered by smartphones, the more difficult it becomes to ensure they are not used ([Campbell 2010](#)).

Rashi analyzed the campaign against 3G phones that appeared in wall posters and in the Haredi press between 2004 and 2007. Haredi leaders used the campaign to reestablish their status within the community. This campaign was run as a fight against a danger to the community, and as a battle being fought while the citadel was going up in flames ([Rashi 2013](#); [Rosenberg and Blondheim 2021b](#)). A study that followed explained that the simple cellphone had become a feature of Haredi society and a popular medium, and therefore banning simple

cellphones would have been a “ruling that the public cannot bear.” Thus, the battle was fought over the domestication of the medium and the demands to adapt it to the community's values. This war pitted a modern means of communication – the cellphone – against the traditional wall posters ([Rosenberg and Rashi 2014; 2015](#)).

Mann documented the process of regulating kosher smartphones and those behind it, such as communal activists (*askanim*, a term that carries negative connotations in Haredi society). From a technical perspective, there are solutions such as an approved app store instead of an internet device. There are different conditions set for acquiring such a device in different communities, authorized by various rabbinical committees. There are restrictions on the number of WhatsApp groups one is allowed to join, as well as a restricted version of WhatsApp without images. Mann describes the familiar strategies of rabbinical proclamations and wall posters, as well as the aforementioned recent phenomenon of placing pressure on parents via their children. Children's books and activity sheets designed to scare children have been distributed with the prospect that their parents will stray both spiritually and in practice if they use smartphones. Finally, the author relates to “news lines” that are used to disseminate intra-communal and trans-group news in a gossipy style ([Mann 2016](#)).

Another study explored the social-technological question of why Haredi society decided to block texts and messaging apps and not just internet use, this based upon interviews with leaders of the struggle against smartphones. They noted that in contrast to the threat on the community's external boundaries, in the form of the intrusion of permissive content, text messaging threatens the community's internal boundaries and hierarchical structures. Messaging facilitates the opening of boundaries between the sexes and subverts control over the dissemination of information; in essence these texts are quiet and erasable. Finally they found a range of voices opposing the ban and in favor of using these applications in the *Behadrei Haredim* and *Kikar Hashabat* web forums ([Rosenberg, Blondheim, and Katz 2016; 2019](#)).

Indeed, most Haredim use kosher phones and address the rabbis' opposition to the smartphone ([Neriya-Ben Shahar 2020a](#)). However, they use the internet on the computer ([Cahaner and Malach 2021](#)). This opposition reflects, in my opinion, that while the leaders fight the texts, they lost the war with the new media.

The Relationship between Haredi Society and Its Rabbis and Mass Media

Going beyond the various mass media manifestations and uses in Haredi society, it is important to relate to the relationship between mass media and Haredi society and its rabbis. Caplan defined the relationship between Haredim and the media as a pragmatic one, which differentiates between media channels considered harmful because of the difficulties involved in supervising and controlling them, and those that lend themselves to oversight, mainly via supervisory committees. This supervision is required mainly because of the unique dilemmas that the media presents to religious communities ([Caplan 2001](#)). Cohen lists the challenges related to media and content, such as modesty, ethics and intellectual rights, working on Shabbat, and gossip and slander, as well as the fear of secular influences ([Cohen 2001](#); [2002](#); [2006c](#); [2006d](#); [2006e](#); [2006f](#); [2014](#); [2017a](#); [2017e](#)).

[Hellinger and Rashi \(2011\)](#) describe Haredi opposition to mainstream media, and suggest a perspective in which the media is dedicated toward social ends. They posit that in Jewish tradition, the media was used as a tool for providing recompense to individuals who had been wronged, and for reinforcing communal solidarity. If the media were used for these purposes, its legitimacy in Haredi society would be stronger. They further differentiate between establishment and non-establishment media, and emphasize the latter's willingness to expose and address internal Haredi social ills, such as the campaign led by *Mishpahah* against discrimination in Haredi schools against Sephardi students.

Spiegel proposes viewing Haredi society as an interpretive community, which decodes holy texts and applies their meanings to daily life. Therefore Haredi media is one of many sources that aid in the construction of this interpretive community and enable reading configurations that are uniquely Haredi ([Spiegel 2013](#)).

Haredi Rabbis and the Media

The relationship between religious leaders and mass media and modern technology has been studied from many perspectives ([Campbell 2010](#); [Cohen 2012b](#); [Stout and Buddenbaum 2014](#)). As we have seen, religious leaders can be originators, creating messages and establishing mechanisms for control over forbidden and permitted media forms. Furthermore, rabbis can themselves be the

message, both by means of their words being publicized and their very public exposure. For example, the cooperation of Rabbi Ifergan with the media in order to build his religious charisma. Mainstream media reporting of events positions him as an important and well-known figure, and his acolytes publicize stories of the miracles he performs, as well as gossip from his dealings ([Feldman 2009](#)).

Empirical studies on the views of rabbis on media indicate a broad range of opinions. Haredi leaders see the media as disseminating gossip and desecration, and a waste of time that ought to be spent on studying Torah. However, the Haredi approach does encourage creating an alternative to secular media. Habad's approach is in this sense unique, as their last leader believed that the media can be used to spread Judaism. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994) forbade television viewing and the reading of secular newspapers but called on his followers to use media technologies in order to spread Jewish ideas. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1910–2013) also took a nuanced stance on these issues. He knew that members of his community owned and watched television sets, and while he opposed the secular media, he understood that it was important to his public. In order to give voice to his views, he encouraged Shas to publish a newspaper, *Yom Leyom* ([Rashi 2011](#)).

Cohen also saw the encounter between rabbis and the media as a complex challenge. The media contains permissive and immodest content, as well as violence, it threatens Jewish family values, and spreads social and political gossip. Fears over the influence of secular society led to various restrictions being placed on media use. In a survey of rabbis from various communities, 41% of Haredi rabbis agreed to a large or very large extent with the idea of the public's right to know; 23% agreed that it was right to publish articles on corruption and improper sexual conduct committed by rabbis; and 64% saw the press as being very harmful to religion. In terms of children's exposure to media, 82% agreed that it is necessary to limit their exposure to television, 85% agreed that children's exposure to radio should be limited, and 88% agreed that their exposure to newspapers should be limited ([Cohen 2011b](#); [2012a](#); [2013d](#); [2017a](#)).

As for rabbis' views of the internet, they consider this medium to be harmful to family values, and to have a negative influence on the social and religious life of Haredim. The rabbis sought to oppose, control, and ultimately restrict internet use, allowing for some partial integration. Most rabbis who responded to the survey own a computer, and most of them use “filtered” internet which is accessed via Haredi internet service providers who limit access to rabbinically authorized forms of content. As Cohen asserts, the complexity of the internet for

religious Jews lays in the fact that it raises difficult halakhic and moral questions, yet also serves as a tool for spreading Torah values, learning, and consulting with rabbis ([Cohen 2012a](#); [2015a](#); [2015b](#)).

Conclusion

Overall, we evidence an impressive flourishing of academic research on media and communications in Israeli Haredi society. If at first it was led by journalists, and by the end of the first decade of the 21st century dozens of scholarly studies appeared. Nevertheless, there are topics that remain unexplored, and in the following concluding remarks I will relate to both.

The traditional Haredi print media has been the subject of many studies. There are multiple descriptions of the growth in the various forms of Haredi journalism alongside mappings of historical and linguistic characteristics. Research into messages include analyses of representations of various issues, primarily gender, Holocaust memory, messianism, and communal uniqueness. There are studies on Synagogue pamphlets, wall posters, and advertisements. In terms of message originators in the Haredi press, we gained knowledge about male and female journalists as well as audience studies focusing on Haredi women.

Notwithstanding these achievements, many Haredi newspapers have not been studied from an historical point of view, especially those published in languages other than Hebrew, with the exception of a few studies on Yiddish papers which remain overall a marginal phenomenon in Haredi society. Studies into messages have left a broad range of subjects unexplored, such as politics, advertising and ethics, and promotional content, representations of diet and health, and the use and editing of photographs and illustrations. Research on message originators is not up to date, and, with the exception of several interviews with editors of Haredi papers, we know very little about how exactly the system of censorship operates in the Haredi press, as well as the relationship of the Haredi press with the Israeli regulator. Finally, we know nothing about newspaper readership and reading patterns among Haredi men and children.

Research on Shabbat pamphlets also demands updating, as well as uncovering their target audience, readership, and patterns of reading and consumption. Likewise is the state regarding wall posters and adverts.

Audio-based media in Haredi society demands extensive research. While several studies on audiotapes and their listenership exist, these need to be re-assessed by accounting for listenership of CDs and MP3s. There is a need for

content analyses of cassettes and radio programs targeting different audiences. To the best of my knowledge, we do not have a single target audience study examining listening patterns, views, and opinions regarding cassettes and radio among Haredi men and children. Likewise, there are no qualitative surveys that reveal how different audiences interpret recorded texts, nor any study that maps out the various originators of cassettes and radio. With the exception of basic information of Haredi pirate radio, there are no studies of regulation and the Haredi audio-based media.

Studies into audio-visual media in Haredi society explored a range of aspects of movie creators, messages, and audiences, however when it comes to television there is very little research. But, as noted above, the fact that new media make it possible to watch television without external oversight, due to the lack of antennae or visible connections, this might make research on television in Haredi society redundant.

The most dynamic and up-to-date area of research is that of new media. It includes studies on the relationship between Haredim and the internet, rabbinical attitudes toward new media, “netnographic” studies, and audience-based content analyses. But considering the unlimited wealth of content published on Haredi websites, this is a huge field for research into representations and images in Haredi online media, such as the main topics in news coverage and editorials; adverts and promotional content; gender representations; representations of the IDF; Haredi and non-Haredi political and spiritual figures; Israel's wars, and its Memorial Days for fallen soldiers and for the Holocaust. Finally, while many studies focused on the popular website *Behadrei Haredim* and on Habad websites, there are many other Haredi sites to examine.

Audience studies have examined patterns of use, views, and opinions regarding the internet, mainly among Haredi women. There are no proper similar studies of Haredi men, the elderly, children, youth, and newly religious. Internet message originators, Haredi internet entrepreneurs, writers, and website administrators have been the subject of extensive study which focused thus far on women employed in this field, but there is a lack of research on female originators. Interestingly, there is no institutional-economic study that describes ownership patterns and relations and inter-communal and extra-communal links between big business, government, and Haredi websites, and the financial setups.

Another growing area of new media that remains a scholarly barren field is that of social networks, with the exception of a few studies of internet forums.

The relationship between Haredim and one of the world's most dominant social media platform, Facebook, and the widespread use among Haredim of Twitter, and seemingly also Instagram ([Chizhik-Goldschmidt 2017](#)), remain overlooked. The same is true of gaming and avatar websites.

Kosher cellphones and smartphones have also been identified as a research area, but most studies have focused on the strategies of community's leaders who oppose these devices using print media and social threats. Few studies reflect voices of the target audience who use these phones, but we do not know enough about patterns of use, views and opinions, methods of concealment, and other issues that stem from owning multiple devices among various Haredi groups.

With the exception of Haredi women and their consuming patterns of media, there are many aspects that remain uncovered. We know little of the patterns of consumption of secular media among various Haredi subgroups, and there is a particular lack of studies pertaining to children, such as education toward media and communications consumption, as well as patterns of use of media among elderly Haredim to create and maintain relationships that help deal with loneliness.

There is no serious examination of the various audiences or mapping of their needs regarding Haredi and general media, such as the different religious and ethnic communities in Haredi society, gender groups, children, the elderly, and differences according to geographic region. In addition, we lack comparative studies looking at differences between Haredi communities in Israel and abroad, and between Haredi communities and other religiously conservative communities. Similarly, I found no studies on specific communities such as newly religious Haredim.

As mentioned above, Haredi women received attention in many and varied studies, but while we have studies of images and representations of women and girls in the Haredi press, there are no such studies regarding Haredi radio, CDs, and movies, or Haredi websites. In addition, many women are employed in the Haredi advertising industry, and this could be a rich subject for future research. Moving on to the men's scene, there is little research of male figures in Haredi movies, and, to the best of my knowledge, no studies on representations of men in the press, radio stations, and websites. In terms of audience, a small group of Haredi men who read Haredi newspapers has been studied in comparison to the reading habits of their wives. There are no studies about Haredi men watching movies, using the internet, listening to the radio or watching television. Similarly, there is no study of men using both kosher phones and smartphones,

apart from one that focused on yeshiva students and is anyway outdated.

Most notable from a media research perspective is the lack of institutional-economic studies. We have no clues as to who are the wealthy owners behind the Haredi press, radio, movie, and internet industries? How do the intra-communal and extra-communal mechanisms of public power, private wealth, and media operate in Haredi society?

The vast majority of studies conducted thus far involved content analysis methods, which are relatively simple, cheap to carry out, and easily available. The small number of audience and originator studies is an indication of the need to invest in this type of research. The large number of qualitative studies compared with the paucity of quantitative studies indicates a need to develop a new generation of scholars who can carry out quantitative studies with large samples, as well as a need for direct financial support for these expensive studies. There have been no experiments looking at the influence of Haredi media according to the accepted rules of impact studies, that is experimental research studies that include test groups and control groups as well as manipulation and other essential elements. Assuming that Haredim are open to media influence like any other population, this is a critical field of research. Finally, I did not find a single impact study.

Some of the research lacunae described above could be explained by the fact that the fast pace of technological development in the West far outstrips the research that seeks to examine it. Certainly, researchers in media and communications, law, sociology, and anthropology accept that it is difficult to keep up with developments. But in this specific case there are entire areas of research lacunae and a lack of use of accepted methodologies, indicating not just a lag in terms of pace, but also possible difficulties in conducting the research itself.

The overall picture painted in this summary is one of a great diversity of studies in certain areas, and a complete lack of studies in others. A graph of the number of studies conducted over time would show that the greatest number of studies into Haredi society and the media have looked at the most traditional form of media, print media, and at new media, for the most part, internet and cellphones, while other media drew thus far less attention. Looking into the various unexplored areas will clearly improve our knowledge of the fascinating relationship between Haredi society and mass media, and most probably shed light on several additional aspects of Haredi society's livelihood.

Assuming that a society and the media it produces and consumes reflect one

another to a certain extent, it seems as though this chapter indicates a complex process in which non-establishment Haredi media outlets emerge and flourish alongside the established ones. In most cases, these new outlets do not belong to a particular Haredi group and they address the entire Haredi sector, at times borderline groups as well such as Zionist-Haredim. I would argue that this is not just an evolutionary process involving the development of new media, it represents a deep social change. Haredim are no longer satisfied merely to read a newspaper containing messages from the heads of their community; they seek a broader range of media sources. It is not just technologies that have changed and developed, but Haredi society as well.

This process would seem to indicate the changes that have befallen Haredi society in its transition from a small and fearful community to a large and diverse society. As a result of this growth, the community's margins have expanded such that they now include groups and individuals who define themselves as Haredim, but who are not willing to accept all of the limitations that are commonplace in this society. One of the characteristic features of these margin dwellers, as well as of the non-establishment Haredi media, is their desire to have it both ways, to be part of Haredi society and to criticize it at the same time.

The emergence of media outlets that are not affiliated with specific Haredi groups and address the entire Haredi society began with the color weekly magazines and continued with the rise of new media. This transition from traditional division into Hasidic, Lithuanian, and Sephardi communities and their respective sub-divisions to the development of communities based on common interests, cutting across denominational and ethnic lines, remains a scholarly challenge, especially since it is not apparent in all Haredi walks of life. Two examples to this effect that arise from this volume are Haredi education and worldviews.

These new Haredi media outlets pay lip service to the conservative ideology, but they address subjects that the traditional media group-oriented media consciously overlooked. This being the case, we are witnessing a widespread development of critical discourse within Haredi society, and moreover the emergence of a significant challenge to the Israeli Haredi established order.

Be it as it may, Haredi society, which declares itself to be traditional and conservative, proves time and again that it is a dynamic, complex, and developing society undergoing far-reaching changes. One of the catalysts of these changes is the mass entry of women and, to much less a degree, men into

the labor market, who often find themselves in workplaces outside the Haredi community and engaging on a daily basis with non-Haredim of all kinds. The Haredim are members of a wider Israeli society, and as such they seek innovation and interest, and are not just concerned with Torah and halakhah.

Notes

1. [This survey focuses on Hebrew-language Haredi media in Israel, and thus excludes newspapers in other languages, mainly Yiddish, English and French. It also relates to larger, well-known papers, and does not refer to numerous unknown pamphlets that are distributed in Haredi neighborhoods.](#)
2. [Website: https://www.kikar.co.il/271693.html](https://www.kikar.co.il/271693.html). To the best of my knowledge, 2018 was the last year that the TGI survey included the Haredi press.
3. [At first glance, it would appear illogical that a paper given away free has a lower distribution share than when it is sold, but there is a sampling error of 0.1%, and thus it would appear that this figure is inaccurate. However, while *Yated Ne'eman*'s distribution share almost triples on the day it is given out for free, there is no effect of free distribution for *Hapeles*. This would indicate that there is far lower demand for the latter.](#)
4. [Notably, the names of two newspapers, *Hapeles* \(1901\) and *Hamodia* \(1910\), re-appeared decades later, a phenomenon that seems to hint at an attempt to draw on the authority bestowed by tradition.](#)
5. [Website: https://www.kikar.co.il/387169.html](https://www.kikar.co.il/387169.html)
6. [Website: https://www.themarket.com/advertising/.premium-1.8801015](https://www.themarket.com/advertising/.premium-1.8801015)

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7 Health and Medicine in Israeli Haredi Society¹

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Introduction

Believing in its authenticity in representing Judaism and Jewish way of life, Haredi society operates as an enclave society ([Sivan 1991](#)) surrounded by symbolic moral walls that act as barriers separating it from the rest of the population. One of the techniques used to maintain these barriers is the establishment of independent social networks and systems, thus minimizing exposure to secular society and its values. However, it is a greater challenge to do so in the field of medicine because professional medical knowledge and training are far less available within this insular society. As a result, medical care for members of the Haredi community forces exposure to the outside secular world. To reduce the inevitable exposure, this community created internal mechanisms of local health services and medical consultation agencies. Interestingly, these local medical initiatives have also been exported for the benefit of the general Israeli population that welcomes and enjoys its advantages. Furthermore, the Haredi community expects that formal health institutions, such as hospitals and health care facilities (HMOs), will comply with Haredi halakhic and cultural norms when providing services to the Haredi community. In addition, the impact of the Haredi community can also be seen on state legislation and regulation of health issues, reflecting their outsize influence on

Israeli politics. These trends have situated the Haredi community as active health providers rather than passive consumers.

Concepts of Health, Medicine, and Physicians in Judaism

The Haredi community's way of life is shaped predominantly by halakhah as perceived in line with Orthodoxy and as set by its spiritual leadership. Therefore, when seeking to examine the position of health and medicine in Haredi society, one ought to review how health, illness, and healing are perceived in Judaism, rabbinical rulings, and halakhah, as well as the contemporary Haredi view of the dynamic between the roles of the various partners in the practice of healing.

From the perspective of Jewish classical sources, there are three partners involved in the healing mission: God, who holds the key to life and whose ways are unrevealed; the physician, who is given permission to heal and whose mission is to improve the health of those in need of relief (Exodus 21:18–19); and the individual, who is guided by Jewish written and Oral Law, additional Judaic commentaries and halakhic compendiums, to fulfill God's will.

Taking care of one's body and keeping it healthy is considered a religious obligation to “be extremely protective of your souls” (Deuteronomy 4:15). This obligation is related to putting effort into caring for one's soul and body and is connected to the Jewish concept of “obligatory effort” (*hishtadlut*), namely the practical effort one is obligated to perform, beyond praying for, and trusting in God's help. In the medical context, both, actively taking preventative steps to preserve health, and seeking medical help when needed, are considered “effort” ([Teman, Ivry, and Goren 2016](#)).

Research confirms that while belief in God is perceived by the Haredi community as a source of healing, reinforcing a sense of well-being, that same belief also forcefully drives people to actively take responsibility for their health ([Coleman-Brueckheimer and Dein 2011](#)). However, in addition to prayer, the vast majority of Haredim do not hesitate to utilize modern medicine, both state-subsidized and private avenues of treatment, sometimes even incurring high financial expenditure ([Caplan 2003](#); [Kasir and Romanov 2017](#)). Surveys indicate that despite the considerable financial difficulties faced by Haredi society, the proportion of poor Haredim who deny themselves medical treatment or buying medicines is lower than among non-Haredi Jews, as well as among Arabs in Israel who have similar levels of poverty ([Stier and Levine 2013](#)). Moreover, the Haredi population in Israel has the highest levels of private outlay on health

relative to all other groups in Israeli society ([Chernichovsky, Bleikh, and Regev 2016](#)). Furthermore, 94% of Haredim rate their health as good, compared with 85% of non-Haredi Jews. Research indicates that the Haredi community's health status is objectively better, as reflected in its high life expectancy ([Chernichovsky and Sharony 2015](#)). Factors such as average young age of the community, communal lifestyle, and faith, may explain both good physical and emotional health status ([Kasir et al. 2019](#)).

Despite the Haredi community's recognition of the importance of the medical profession, and the considerable esteem in which it holds for those who engage in this important work, the number of Haredi doctors in the Israeli health system is considerably low in comparison to the relative size of the Haredi population in Israel. Of these, most were born and educated abroad, or became part of the Haredi community after they had already earned their medical degree. While further research is required here, there may be a number of factors to consider: the Haredi “society of learners” model, in which men are expected to engage almost exclusively in Torah study ([Friedman 1991](#)); missing educational prerequisites for the medical profession; the lack of gender-separated programs for medical studies; the expectation of Haredi model of raising a large family in one's twenties and thirties which clashes with the extensive and demanding nature of professional training generally, and medical training specifically; and ethical dilemmas that may be raised by practicing medicine such as issues of male/female modesty.

However, the last few years have seen a slight change, as small numbers of both male and female Haredi medical students can now be identified in faculties of medicine in Israeli universities ([Lansky 2021](#); [Linder 2014](#)).² This modest shift may be attributed to the trends Avraham Steinberg described in 1991: Expansion in opportunities available to members of the Haredi community to enter the professions, including medicine, and a lessening in rabbinical opposition on principle to studying medicine ([Steinberg 1991](#)).

Unique Health Behaviors and Characteristics of the Haredi Community – The Influence of *Halakhah* and the Haredi Way of Life

The cultural values, perceptions, and lifestyle held by members of the Haredi community may affect health behaviors, characteristics, and statistics. The connection between religious identity and health profiles has been demonstrated

by studies in Israel ([Chernichovsky and Sharony 2015](#); [Jaffe et al. 2005](#)), and the Israeli medical establishment, including medical research and practice, recognizes the unique medical needs of Haredi society.

While some Haredi values and lifestyles promote health, others might challenge or even have an undesirable effect on various health parameters. Such for example is the fundamental value of the “Sanctity of life” (*kdushat hahaim*), which finds expression in medical decisions and practices regarding beginning and end of life. Hence, as there is a religious prohibition regarding selective abortions, there is an aversion to prenatal testing (only in exceptional cases) and a limited use of prenatal diagnosis (PND) among members of the community ([Appel, 2003](#); [Hashiloni-Dolev 2007](#); [Remennick 2006](#)). This, in turn, leads to relatively high rates of live births of babies with defects that are potentially detectable during pregnancy ([Appel 2003](#); [Averbuch and Avni 2015](#); [Romano-Zelikha and Shohat 2011](#)). But, this very same fundamental value also drives the widespread use of life-extending practices and technologies, even for terminally ill patients ([Asman 2013](#)).

The religious obligation to take care of one's health, and the Jewish concept of “obligatory effort” may explain the fact that majority of Haredim have no hesitation in utilizing modern medicine – socialized or private – sometimes at high financial cost, and that only in an extreme minority of cases will individuals or families from the Haredi society avoid seeking help or medical services ([Caplan 2003](#); [Kasir and Romanov 2017](#)). Surveys indicate that the rate of Haredim who forego medical treatment, or do not purchase medicines for financial reasons, is lower than other poor population groups in Israel ([Stier and Levine 2013](#)). In addition, 83% of the Haredi community purchase complementary medical insurance (a higher level of the standard state-mandated minimum health insurance) ([Kasir and Romanov 2017](#)).

The unique lifestyle also has visible and significant negative and positive effects on its members' health. [Chernichovsky and Sharony \(2015\)](#) claim that Haredim enjoy better health and greater life expectancy than would be predicted by their socioeconomic status. They link this to specific unique features including communal Haredi lifestyle and its dense social support networks, the community's beliefs, prayer, strong familial and social relationships, and a high level of communal engagement (e.g. volunteering). Another possible explanation is the commonplace availability of supplementary treatments and assistance during medical crises, both for patients and their families. This is made possible by community fundraising drives for this purpose ([Cohen 2006](#)); by various aid

organizations and cooperatives (such as the *gemahs*) that lend and distribute medical equipment and medications; by the widespread phenomenon of Haredi community members volunteering in these organizations; and by the commitment to the commandment to visit and assist the sick ([Cohen 2006](#)).³

But data also suggests that community members are less involved in sports and that physical activity rates among its members are as low as a third compared with the secular Jewish Israeli population.⁴ This may increase the probability of obesity and higher morbidity resulting of diseases associated with overweight, as there is a known correlation between increased physical activity, and lower risk of obesity and other related conditions. Obesity, diabetes, and anemia are also prevalent among the Haredi population because of eating habits derived from low awareness of healthy nutrition (Peles and Rudolf 2021). Additionally, the high number of holidays in the Jewish calendar, and the regularity of celebrating life-cycle Jewish milestones such as circumcision and weddings characterized by high-calorie meals are a primary component that contributes to higher levels of obesity. The higher-than-average consumption of sugary soft drinks, ketchup, and snacks compared to the general population ([Samuel and Maoz-Bruner 2020](#)) support this thesis.

Various studies present data which reflects the connection between cultural characteristics and factors' influence on Haredi men, women, and children's health. The typical Haredi man, who from a relatively young age spends many hours studying Torah ([Friedman 1991](#)), while indoors and (primarily) sitting, has a negative impact on his health; as shown by a study linking changes in bone density to a high incidence of fractures, attributed to lack of physical activity ([Taha et al. 2001](#)). In contrast, the rate of smoking among Haredi men is lower relative to the general population in Israel ([Kasir et al. 2019](#)).⁵ This might be attributed to unique cultural characteristics of Haredi society, a disciplined society that obeys ethical rules and who abide by the instructions of rabbis, most of whom publicly oppose and disqualify smoking ([Kopel Keinan-Boker et al. 2012](#)).

Haredi women's health is also influenced by unique cultural characteristics and factors. For example, one of the studies found a relatively low incidence of breast cancer among Haredi women. This may be attributed to low smoking rates among Haredi women and to the high number of pregnancies and lengthy periods of breastfeeding, which reduce the risk of breast cancer. However, despite the low overall incidence, the same study finds higher mortality rates from breast cancer due to late detection and diagnosis, attributed to lower use of

preventative healthcare and to delays in diagnosis.⁶ These findings are, at least partially, explained by the high daily burden carried by Haredi women, who frequently carry the dual roles of managing the household and serving as the family breadwinner ([Sadetzky 2013](#)).

The Haredi woman's pregnancy and birth experience is also deeply influenced by cultural perceptions. Studies have shown that the desire to fulfill the commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” by having as many children as possible is reflected in relatively high birth rates among this group and in the frequent use of various practices of advanced fertility technology ([Ivry 2010; 2013; 2015; Ivry, Teman, and Frumkin 2011; Kahn 2000; 2002](#)). In addition, pregnancy experience shape identity among Haredi women ([Engelsman et al. 2018](#)), who are acculturated to view pregnancy as a “way of life” ([Teman and Ivry 2021](#)). Michal [Raucher \(2020\)](#) suggests that despite attempts of doctors, rabbis, and the state, who are trying to control the reproduction of Haredi women, these women succeed in cultivating and developing a “reproductive agency” through the embodied experiences derived from their multiple pregnancies.

Haredi children are at a higher risk to encounter home injuries compared with children of the same age in the general Jewish population in Israel. Furthermore, mortality rates resulting of unintentional injuries in the last five years are 1.4 times higher among Haredi children, compared with non-Haredi Jewish children.⁷ Yet, Haredi residential areas have the lowest rates of children being referred to emergency rooms ([Falk and Kalif 2022](#)). This may well be a result of greater maternal experience to cope with various health situations without making a visit to the emergency department. However, further research is required.

In addition, there are multiple conflicting studies about vaccination rates in the Haredi community. Some studies on vaccination of Haredi children between the ages 2–5 in Mother-and-Infant Care Centers indicate low vaccination rates relative to the general population ([Cohen et al. 2010](#)).⁸ These scholars suggest several possible culturally related explanations for this gap, given the high numbers of children in Haredi families. For example, the relatively low exposure to health information in the media; religious outlooks that are not supportive of vaccination; lack of trust in the Ministry of Health. However, later studies that focused on children under 17 years of age, indicated higher vaccination rates relative to the general population.⁹ In addition, flu vaccination rates among children increased from 12% in 2013–2014 to 25% in 2015, as a result of

culturally sensitive intervention in raising awareness and follow-ups ([Averbuch and Avni 2015](#), 164). This finding suggests that investing in awareness-raising interventions can improve health outcomes in the Haredi population.

Due to the scope of this chapter, presenting a wider array of examples relating to impact of socio-cultural factors on the health profile of this community is limited. However, we would like to draw a more elaborate attention to the issue of social stigma related to health conditions in the Haredi community, as it exemplifies the major role socio-cultural views and values play in the Haredi health arena.

Health, Stigma, and the Haredi Matchmaking Social Infrastructure

The issue of health and stigma related to health conditions is particularly dominant in the Haredi health arena and much so in the matchmaking of physically or mentally impaired.

Within Haredi society, there is less exposure to reliable scientific information, which results in irrational concerns and disproportionate stigma about certain diseases and disorders, particularly those that might impede on future fertility. In a study about the experiences of mothers caring for children with Type 1 diabetes, [Spitz \(2018\)](#) interviewed 34 mothers from the Haredi sector. The informants claimed that even when information is demonstrably false, it is often regarded as reliable within the community. False information reinforces stigma about illness, particularly mental illness. This process is referred to in the literature as “genetic framing” ([Easter 2012](#)). In the hierarchy of stigmas about diseases, mental illness ranks highest, together with cancer, including cancer in remission, and genetic-related problems, followed by conditions with visible signs. Invisible conditions carry lower stigma because their existence is not apparent ([Gilboa-Feldman 2015](#); [Spitz 2018](#)).

The stigma and prejudice around mental health issues within the Haredi community ([Bilu and Witztum 1994](#); [Goodman 2013a](#); [2013b](#); [Maman 2014](#)) as well as disabilities ([Gershoni 2018](#); [Kandel 2010](#); [Kukanov 2021](#); [Orr, Unger, and Finkelstein 2021](#); [Taub 2014](#); [Tzur 2014](#)) are reflected through the tendency to conceal illness and disorders ([Spitz 2018](#)). The phenomenon of those around patients suffering from stigma is known as “courtesy stigma” ([Birenbaum 1970](#)). In Haredi society, courtesy stigma may be attached to the healthy siblings of an individual with a particular condition, as the “stain” of the illness affects the

marriage prospects of those siblings as well ([Gilboa-Feldman 2015](#); [Spitz 2018](#)).

The central role which matchmaking (*shidukhim*) plays within Haredi society, and the concomitant influence it has on the behavior and decision-making process of young people and their families – both specifically in evaluating suitable marriage partners and more generally in other areas, including health and medicine – cannot be overstated. “Assortative mating” ([Schwartz 2013](#)), namely choosing a marriage partner based upon fixed social characteristics such as ethnicity and religiosity or acquired characteristics such as education and health status, is an apt description of the matchmaking mechanisms. In this context, any disease or disability, whether inherited or acquired, will likely be a barrier to finding a partner and will necessitate accepting some equivalent-level “blemish” in a potential partner, a physical or medical issue, lesser family background, or lower status ([Zalcborg Block 2013](#); [Gilboa-Feldman 2015](#); [Spiegel 2013](#), [Spitz 2018](#)).

In this context, the cultural common practice of endogamous marriage prevailing among Jews in general, and specifically among Haredim people, plays a role as it results in high incidence of recessive genetic diseases ([Prainsack and Siegal, 2010](#)). The need to reduce the incidence of recessive gene diseases, as well as minimize stigma related to “genetic families,” especially within the Haredi matchmaking arena, led to widespread use of premarital genetic testing prior to beginning the matchmaking process. These genetic testings, which began as an internal initiative within Haredi society, are conducted via the Haredi *Dor Yesharim* health organization ([Ekstein and Katzenstein 2001](#); [Gilboa-Feldman 2015](#); [Prainsack and Siegal 2006](#); [Raz and Vizner 2008](#); [Vizner, 2007](#); [Zalcborg 2014](#)). This Haredi health organization was founded to prevent recessive genetic diseases, and its goal is to prevent couples from marrying when the two partners of a prospective match are carriers of the same genetic disease, by testing the genetic suitability prior to introducing them to each other. The “culturally tailored” *Dor Yesharim* program meets the specific needs of the Haredi community ([Ekstein and Katzenstein 2001](#)) as its cultural adaptations take into account the structure and action principles of Haredi matchmaking. The tests improve the health outcome in the Haredi community as they considerably reduce the number of children born with genetic diseases,¹⁰ and reduce stigma related to “genetic families” as they elevate the “health capital” and matchmaking status of the carriers of these genes ([Gilboa-Feldman 2015](#)). So much so, that these tests have become a prerequisite in the Haredi matchmaking process ([Raz and Vizner 2008](#)).

The success in introducing culturally adapted, rabbinically supported, premarital tests to Haredi society by drafting medical technology of genetic tests, in order to resolve the medically related socio-cultural problem of stigmatization of genetic carriers within the matchmaking arena, is an example of “mediculturization.” Namely, the proactive processes by which society recruits medicine, in order to enable compliance with socio-cultural values, norms, needs, and practices ([Gilboa-Feldman 2015](#)). *Dor Yesharim* exemplifies the importance, as well as the benefit, of the much-needed cooperation between rabbinical and medical authorities.

Rabbinical Authorities' Involvement in the Utilization of Health Services

When it comes to the utilization of health services in the Haredi community, the community's rabbinical authorities are major actors whose involvement is derived from the Haredi cultural ideology and lifestyle.

One of the factors shaping the construction of medicine and health in the Haredi community is obedience to rabbinical authority that characterizes the community ([Caplan and Stadler 2009](#)). As mentioned above, community members are raised to be wary of the influences of modernity and innovation, but they are not averse to a careful use of its advantages, particularly in medical care and treatment ([Caplan 2003](#)). Emmanuel Sivan described how members of the Haredi community view modern medicine as a necessary tool in the pursuit of the goals of caring for their health and preserving life. This dependency is exemplified by the double entendre attributed to a former leading rabbinical figure of the Lithuanian community: “We live in exile among the doctors” ([Sivan 1991](#), 55).

As in many other areas of life, Haredim tend to involve and consult with rabbis regarding making important decisions in the field of health. The rabbi's advice on various medical treatment options will frequently carry greater weight than recommendations of doctors; this may sometimes influence the type and quality of treatment that patients receive ([Greenfeld 2001](#); [Shaked 2009](#)). Certain Haredi rabbis with the appropriate halakhic and medical expertise specialize in complex medically related halakhic questions, in which there may be a conflict between specific medical procedure and halakhic strictness ([Caplan 2003](#)). As they serve an alternative source of authority for members of the Haredi community on all matters related to medical decision-making ([Caplan 2003](#);

[Caplan and Stadler 2009](#)), they attempt to resolve such conflicts by finding ways of using such procedures within the limits set by halakhah ([Mittman et al. 2007](#)). Birth control methods are an example of such an area of conflict ([Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008](#)).

It should be noted that there is specific halakhic literature dealing with medical issues, such as the series of books written by Rabbi Yitzhak Zilberstein, who is considered a halakhic authority on medical issues. In addition, Zilberstein heads the Rabbinical committee at the Haredi-communal *Maayanei Hayeshuah* medical center and gives weekly medical-halakhic lectures to doctors. Furthermore, there are books and articles by Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (1915-2006) and other rabbinical authorities on various related topics and sub-topics. In addition, rabbis act as cultural mediators between patients and doctors, and between Haredi society and the medical knowledge of treatment authorities, in what is described as “rabbinically mediated medicine” ([Ivry 2010](#); [Lightman and Shor 2002](#)).

Some rabbis are directly involved in the patient-physician interaction. [Ivry \(2010\)](#) describes how a triadic interaction of patient-rabbi-doctor replaces the usual dyadic interaction of patient-doctor, resulting in a model she refers to as “kosher medicine.” In this model, negotiations are conducted to find culturally suitable treatment solutions to halakhic problems that may arise during fertility treatments, which are acceptable to all three parties involved. However, it is important to note that recent research referring to pregnancy issues as well as to pediatric vaccines, indicates that to some extent Haredi women develop agency, as they are making some medical decisions independently ([Keshet and Popper-Giveon 2021](#); [Raucher 2020](#)).

Many health professionals comply with rabbinical authorities, and cooperation between the medical profession and halakhic authorities occurs throughout the Israeli medical system, thus, creating a unique rabbinical-medical discourse and producing a profound shift in the distribution of power between medical and halakhic experts. When both sides are amenable, and willing to cooperate with one another, this will usually result in full compliance by Haredi patients.

Health and Sub-Groups in Haredi Society

The Haredi community is characterized by various streams and sub-groups. Some communities have their own local health and medical support organizations which nevertheless offer their services to the general public. For

example, *Refuah Vehaim* which provides extensive assistance to families dealing with children with disabilities and special needs.¹¹ It was founded and operates as part of the Vizhnitz Hassidic community, yet it offers its services to the population at large.

Another example is *Laniado* Hospital in Netanya. While it is an integral part of the Sanz Hasidic communal institutions, the hospital admits patients without differentiation and regardless of their communal affiliation. Moreover, it serves non-Haredi patients as well. As the hospital website states: “The Admor [i.e. Hasidic leader] expressed his vision for creating a hospital in his founding statement: ‘To strive as far as possible to ease the pain and suffering of the patients, and to improve their emotional and spiritual state.’ Sanz Medical Center-Laniado Hospital has adopted this vision as stated in its mission statement: ‘The hospital will aid every person’.”¹²

Indeed, in strong contrast to the policies of schools, synagogues, and other communal institutions which are identified with, and serve specific Haredi sub-communities, Haredi health, and medical support organizations generally offer their services in the event of health distress and medical crisis regardless of communal affiliation.

Comparative studies regarding health characteristics and practices of specific Haredi communities are yet required. A body of research along these lines would tie in with a research trend that has emerged in recent decades, looking at unique characteristics of the various streams within Haredi society, in line with the understanding that “the title ‘Haredi’ is a surname, not a first name” ([Caplan 2017](#)).

Intra-Communal Health and Medicine Support Organizations

There is a wide array of voluntary health and medical organizations which operate within the Haredi community. Some provide relief and support in dealing with difficulties derived from either long-term health challenges or acute medical crises. Others focus on providing information and support for patients and families who are challenged by specific illness.

As mentioned earlier, unlike other areas of life, in the field of health the Haredi community is forced to rely on the modern external health system. The enormous financial burden, high professional standards, large numbers of qualified personnel, and government regulations that require to create and operate a modern health system, all make a purely Haredi professional medical

system impossible. Consequently, the inevitable interaction with extra-communal health institutions exposes members of the community to health system employees and patients who are not members of the Haredi community, as well as to modern technology which may not always be in line with Halakhic guidelines. These encounters might potentially create a “crack” in the symbolic walls that act as moral barriers separating the Haredi enclave from its general surroundings.

As a response to the concerns mentioned above, the Haredi community has created a variety of health and medicine-related organizations and services. Thus, alongside medical services provided by the public health system, there is an array of institutions, organizations, nonprofit associations, individuals, health and medical support, and advisory bodies, that offer culturally adapted responses to the unique medical needs of the Haredi community. These organizations provide a broad range of medical support and assistance, including emergency response, initial treatment, medical equipment, and welfare support for families during health-related crises.

The circles of support in the fields of medicine and health occur on three levels: the individual, based on the religious obligation to give charity (Deuteronomy 15:7) and show kindness; the communal, expressed via the variety of grass-root health organizations of Haredi sub-groups; the societal, some of which have developed to the extent that they serve all of Israeli society ([Hellinger 2010](#)). Moreover, the structure of Haredi social networks is very important for the operation of aid organizations to its members, as many do not use online communication, and rely on word-of-mouth information. Research shows that a high percentage of Haredim choose to volunteer in health organizations at a rate double that of the non-Haredi population in Israel ([Kasir and Romanov 2017](#)).

Supportive Health and Medicine Related Organizations (gemahim)

One of the unique characteristics of the Haredi community is the prevalence of voluntary grass-root organizations that provide various services for free or for a small fee. These range from large organizations to tiny one-man operations, that operate in virtually all areas of life and provide a multitude of unique services in the spirit of the internal ethics of giving and shared responsibility. These local voluntary initiatives help reduce expenses associated with the unique structure and lifestyle of the Haredi community, including such relating to medical needs

([Shai 2008](#)).

Gemahim that operate in the field of medicine and health occupy a prominent role in this area of activity and serve the general population as well. For example, a catalog of *gemahim* in the Haredi city of Modi'in Illit lists more than 100 *gemahim* that provide and lend various medical equipment and supplies.

Although medical *gemahim* provide intra-communal health services that make a real difference to the health and quality of life of its community members, there is simultaneously a somewhat problematic aspect which must be taken into account as some operate without regulatory guidelines of the Israeli Ministry of Health. For example, *gemahim* that provide medicines are operated by people with no pharmaceutical license, and medicines are dispensed without a prescription. Moreover, while some of the medicines are purchased by the *gemah* with donation money, frequently the stock of medicines includes 'left-over' medicines no longer in need which are donated by members of the community. These medicines may have not been properly stored, which could affect their safety and effectiveness.

Support Organizations for Specific Medical Challenges

Alongside *gemahim* there are various non-profit organizations that offer aid to individuals and families who are challenged by specific medical conditions. For example, organizations that offer assistance for patients suffering from a particular disease, or prenatal and postnatal support for mothers. Each of these organizations caters to the needs of its target audience, most of them serve the Haredi community exclusively, though there are a few that serve the general Israeli population as well.

One medical area that attracts particular attention is assistance related to fertility and post-birth. The appreciation for childbirth evident both in halakhic sources and in the community's social norms ([Siebzehner and Lehmann 2014](#)) results in a high level of active support for women pre- and post birth. This support represents an intersection of two central values in the Haredi community: health, and reproduction.

There is a wide range of intra-communal organizations that focus on providing help and support with fertility issues and impediments in accordance with halakhic guidelines, such as *Puah* Institute¹³ and *Bonei Olam*.¹⁴ Israeli society in general holds pro-natalistic and eugenic perspectives ([Graur and Graur 1992](#); [Hashiloni-Dolev 2007](#); [Stoler-Liss, 2003](#)) as reflected in a much wider use

of fertility technologies and pre-pregnancy testing than found in other countries. However, fertility treatments for Haredi patients must meet halakhic requirements. These Haredi support organizations fill this gap in cooperation with the state medical system, by providing childless couples access to fertility techniques that are halakhically permissible and by maintaining constant contact with rabbinical authorities to resolve halakhic questions as they arise ([Ivry 2010; 2013; 2015; Ivry, Teman, and Frumkin 2011; Teman and Ivry 2021](#)). Some of these organizations even offer financial support to families, to help deal with the high cost of fertility treatments.

Another well-known health initiative in the Haredi community is post-delivery support which has long been gaining ground in Jewish history. One such organization, *Ezer Layoldot* (literally ‘help for mothers, post-delivery’),” founded during the early days of the Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel and funded by Baron Rothschild, provided essential medical assistance and support to mothers and their newborns ([Shvarts 1998](#)).

The most well-known post-delivery convalescent home is located in Telz Stone, a small Haredi town close to Jerusalem. Originally, it was established by entrepreneurs as a solution for young orphan women who were graduates of *Beit Laplitot* orphanage. In line with this concept, currently, there are numerous such convalescent homes throughout Israel. In recent years we can see such initiatives that seek to emulate the Haredi model and adapt it to the secular population as well – mostly incorporated with maternal wards in various hospitals in Israel that are commercially oriented. In addition, local post-delivery support initiatives can be found throughout Haredi communities, as Haredi women provide a social network of mutual assistance and support such as preparing meals and offering help in caring for children, and much more ([Monnickendam-Givon, Schwartz, and Gidron 2016](#)).

Another category of health organizations in Haredi society are those that focus on specific diseases or disorders. These offer support systems for patients and their families including access to information, dealing with various related technical challenges, and financial assistance. Some organizations also arrange additional activities such as informative seminars in the community, support groups, and fun activities for sick patients and their families. They are largely funded by donations utilizing volunteers from the community. Occasionally, formal agencies provide support groups for cancer patients, even though discussing cancer has traditionally been taboo in the Haredi community and the word cancer is omitted, referring to it as “the disease.” Yet, there are widespread

activities within the community to provide support and aid to cancer patients, as there is in general Israeli society. One of the most prominent organizations in this field is *Zihron Menachem* which helps pediatric cancer patients and their families. Another example is *Beit Natan* that supports research and support groups mainly for Haredi women.

Institutional Health Services

Over the last few years, the Haredi community's natural growth as well as its need for culturally adapted health services has incentivized Israel's HMOs to comply with cultural requirements of Haredi patients and demands made by Haredi leaders. The high number of children per family results in an average low age for the Haredi population; thus, Haredi families represent a highly desirable target group for HMOs. In order to gain the largest possible share of the Haredi market, the HMOs have developed a range of culturally adapted health services for the sector ([Niv 2016](#)) and have made their services more accessible through adaptations to the accepted norms of Haredi society, such as separated wings for gynecological services; testing babies for jaundice prior to circumcision, insurance coverage for the costs of genetic testing by *Dor Yesharim*, recuperation services for new mothers, and call centers for medical-halakhic questions, such as whether patients should fast on the Day of Atonement.

The competition between the various HMOs is also evident in the large number of branches they operate in Haredi cities and neighborhoods as geographical proximity is particularly relevant to the Haredi public, most of which relies on public transportation. The HMOs also employ communal activists (*askanim*) from the Haredi community, under the formal title, “customer relations coordinators” who serve primarily as mediators between the HMOs and their Haredi members, helping members access the services offered by the HMO.

In addition, hospitals in Israel found themselves in competition over Haredi patients. Thus, they recently developed a range of culturally sensitive amenities. These include rabbinical services in hospitals, special food catering to various dietary requirements, and arrangements for family members to stay in the hospital over Sabbath.

There are three specific hospitals that focus on Haredi patients: *Shaare Zedek* in Jerusalem, the aforementioned *Laniado* in Netanya, and *Maayanei Hayeshuah* in Bnei Brak. In these culturally oriented institutions, halakhic principles are

carefully followed alongside with medical practice, from halakhic guidelines of modesty (*tzniut*) and maintaining gender separation as much as possible, to medical treatment policies that consider halakhic principles. Of these three hospitals, the latter is the only one located within the geographical boundaries of a Haredi enclave.

A few years ago, a first Haredi Mental Health Center was added to *Maayanei, Hayeshuah* in cooperation with the Israeli Ministry of Health, aiming to serve the Haredi community. It provides culturally adopted psychiatric treatments and services, as well as raise awareness, and reduce stigma associated with mental illness. The center aims to provide treatment of mental health issues to those who otherwise might avoid it.

Haredi Health Initiatives that Reach Out beyond the Haredi Enclave

In addition to the internal health-related activities within the Haredi community, there are influential inter-relations between the Haredi community and mainstream Israeli society in the field of health and medicine. Recent years have seen a rise in motivation within the community to contribute to Israeli society. Simultaneously, there has been greater openness on the part of secular society to accept and learn from the volunteering ethic of the Haredi community, which was previously viewed as a parasitic and traditional society from which nothing could be learned ([Babis 2006](#)). Thus, various health-related Haredi voluntary organizations have transcended the boundaries of the Haredi enclave and provide welfare and health services to all of Israel's population, offering an opportunity for members of the Haredi community to play an active role in civic service, and receive public recognition for their efforts ([Stadler, Lomsky-Feder, and Ben-Ari 2008](#)).

Voluntary Health-Related Support Organizations

Yad Sarah and *ZAKA* are examples of organizations providing medical services whose roots lie in Jewish values as perceived in the Haredi community. *Yad Sarah* was founded in the 1970s by Rabbi Uri Lupoliansky (later the Mayor of Jerusalem) as a center for loaning medical equipment. The original impetus was his difficulty in obtaining a nebulizer when one of his children was sick. While initially Lupoliansky ran the center out of his own home, over the years the

organization grew into a national and international network, with many branches throughout Israel and abroad; its scope has broadened to providing many additional services, such as home care for the elderly, developmental treatment for children, recuperation centers, and assistance for people with disabilities, among others.

ZAKA was founded in 1995 against the backdrop of a spate of terror attacks sweeping Israel, to help ensure proper burial of the bodies and body parts of terror victims according to halakhic requirements.

These two organizations share another important feature: Their global reach, which transcends not only the boundaries of the Haredi enclave, but the borders of the State of Israel. *Yad Sarah* has branches all over the world, and in 2006 was included in the United Nation's list of Non-Governmental Organizations.¹⁵ ZAKA's International Rescue Unit provides assistance in response to terror attacks and natural disasters all over the world such as the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010.

[Stadler, Lomsky-Feder, and Ben-Ari \(2008\)](#) note an interesting difference between the two organizations. The fundamental value that led to the establishment of ZAKA was the halakhic imperative of preserving the sanctity of victims' bodies which the state could not provide, thus viewed by its volunteers as a unique Haredi contribution to the general Israeli society and an alternative to military service. In comparison, *Yad Sarah* is based on the fundamental values of giving and social solidarity, thus offering an answer to the weakening of welfare policy in Israel, via the creation of citizenship based on voluntariness and mutual aid.

Alongside these two organizations, there are countless others that were similarly founded to meet internal communal needs but have since expanded outwards to serve the general population of Israel, and even an international consumer. Examples include *Ezer Mizion*, *Ezrah Lemarpe*, and *Magen Laholeh*.

Ezer Mizion was founded in 1979 by Rabbi Chananya Cholak, and is considered one of the largest voluntary organizations in the field of medical support.¹⁶ It was awarded the Israel Prize in 2008. With the help of tens of thousands of volunteers, this organization provides aid and support to patients and their families in 31 towns and cities throughout Israel. Like other health and aid organizations in Haredi society, *Ezer Mizion* was also established in response to an individual's experience of a health crisis, and grew into a large-scale communal organization, eventually serving the general Israeli population. In addition to medical assistance and support services, this organization operates an

advisory and consultation department, as well as a national Bone Marrow Donor Registry, which was set up in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Health in 1998.

Recently, *Ikhud Hazalah* (United Hatzalah of Israel), another Haredi health organization founded in 2006, gained formal recognition as a provider of First Aid Emergency services. This organization is staffed by volunteers who are primarily Haredi, but it includes non-Haredim and non-Jews who serve as first responders to disasters and emergencies, providing primary aid at the scene.

For Haredim, the field of health in general, and emergency response specifically, offer a unique opportunity in which they can contribute to Israeli society as a whole; thus, rectifying their image as segregating, and unwilling to shoulder its fair share in societal burdens.

Voluntary Health Advisory Organizations

Another thus far under-studied unique service that takes place in the Haredi community and serves the needs of general Israeli population as well is voluntary medical advisory organizations and health advisors. Even though these advisors are not medically educated, people may turn to them for mediation and networking between medical professionals and community members on specific medical issues ([Coleman-Brueckheimer, Spitzer, and Koffman 2009](#)). These advisors, who maintain up-to-date knowledge and expertise in medical innovations, remain in direct and ongoing contact with senior physicians in Israel and abroad, and assist anyone who turns to them – not only Haredim.

One such example is *Ezrah Lemarpeh*, founded in 1979 by Rabbi Elimelech Firer, who still heads the organization.¹⁷ He became involved in the medical field as he was helping a sick relative gain access to the medical treatment he had needed, and thereafter he set out to learn about doctors' work by speaking to them directly. Without any formal medical training, Firer became an important source of knowledge and information about doctors in a wide range of medical expertise as well as regarding preferred forms of medical treatments. not only in Israel but all around the world. *Ezrah Lemarpeh* provides advice and refers patients to doctors who can treat them, often via private medical services. Thus, it created a dynamic that has had a formative impact on the health sector in Israel ([Leibovich-Dar 2015](#)). Apart from counseling, *Ezrah Lemarpeh* operates its own treatment and rehabilitation centers, medical equipment loan centers, and assists in transporting patients in Israel and abroad. In recognition of his contribution to

Israeli society, Firer was awarded the Israel Prize in 1997.

Magen Laholeh is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1994 by Rabbi Benyamin Fisher at the prompting of his teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1910-1995).¹⁸ Similar to the other mentioned examples, this organization was initiated by Fisher as a result of a personal experience when he spent several months, helping arrange medical treatment for a friend who was injured in a traffic accident. *Magen Laholeh* provides free medical advice; logistical and bureaucratic assistance to help patients access suitable treatment; loans of medical equipment; transportation services for patients; and general support throughout extended periods of medical treatment. In addition, it holds a mental health unit.

Haredi Involvement and Influence on Medical and Health Legislation in Israel

The influence of the Haredi community, its leaders, and halakhah, is evident in Israeli State legislation on health matters. The issue of health, medicine, and the halakhic sanctity of life is not part of the official status quo in religious-secular relations. However, Haredi society has been deeply involved over the years in formulating medical legislation and policy in Israel. A considerable number of health-related laws show clear influence of the Haredi political parties. For example, as part of the groundwork for the introduction of the Dying Patient Law 5766–2006, a public committee was established which submitted recommendations to the minister of health;¹⁹ this committee included a Halakhah Sub-Committee comprising seven Haredi rabbis and doctors.²⁰

The Haredi dedication to halakhah influences not only legislation but also various decisions on medical issues in Israel which are based on ethical outlooks rooted in Jewish sources as interpreted by Haredi Halakhic authorities such as life-extending treatments ([Ganz et al. 2006](#)). These influences may also result in approaches to medical research that are considered liberal such as the use of fetal stem cells in research, a practice permitted by halakhah, in contrast to the position taken by most Christian institutions. Consequently, it is much easier to pursue this kind of research in Israel than in many other Western countries. [Lavi \(2008\)](#) presents this as an example of regional religious and cultural influence. In contrast to prevailing views, it is not necessarily a struggle between religious conservatism and technological progress, but rather a function of the different restrictions imposed by different religions.

As noted, the extensive involvement of halakhah in Israeli legislation and decision-making relating to medicine and health usually occurs without any public struggle, unlike other secular-religious issues such as laws and regulations pertaining to the Sabbath, dietary laws, and personal status. There are several theories as to why this is so. One possibility is a form of subconscious denial inherent to medical issues: People hope not to have to face difficult medical questions themselves, so they shy away from public discussion or controversy on the topic. Another possibility is that the influence of Jewish ethics on decision-making in the field of health is sought and created by the State's legal system and policymakers ([Halperin 2013](#)), such that there is broad agreement as to its inclusion. [Asman \(2013\)](#) identified this intersection as being made possible due to the use of Hebrew sources that reflect universal values, which enable the application of both liberal and religious ethical principles in tandem.

Conclusion

The concepts, attitudes, and behavior of members of the Haredi community regarding health and medicine, as in other fields, are shaped based on Jewish principles and halakhah interpretation and the lifestyle derived by these. The Haredi way of life results in a characteristic health profile that includes a unique pattern of utilization of health and medical services.

Traditional Jewish sources require the individual to make every effort to care for one's own health and life, in addition to prayer and belief, by taking active steps to maintain health and treat medical issues, in accordance with halakhic rulings. Given the necessary reliance on the general Israeli health system, existing outside of the Haredi enclave, the members of this society engage in two main modes of activity: First, they act as consumers who rely on services provided by external health agencies such as hospitals and HMOs. In this mode, Haredim expect these agencies to comply with halakhic and cultural adaptations.

The second mode involves a more proactive stance, both within and outside the Haredi communal enclave. This stance is a derivative of Jewish views on the sanctity of life and of mutual aid, in addition to the desire to preserve the Haredi enclave's moral barriers. They do so by creating an internal system of organizations offering medical advice and support services to all. Thus, the aid, support, and knowledge management mechanisms they create, operate well beyond the boundaries of the enclave and serve the non-Haredi population as well.

In addition, representatives of Haredi society are also involved in advancing legislation on health issues and in managing the Israeli health system. Hence, Haredi community members become active partners in the design, operation, and management of Israel's health and medical system.

All of these indicate that the health arena is a fascinating arena of rare collaborations which is based on mutual giving and acceptance and carries the potential of becoming a bridge between the Haredi community and the surrounding majority of Israeli society.

Notes

1. [The COVID-19 crisis most probably carried an impact on health behaviors of the Haredi community, as well as the interaction between it and the general Israeli society \(Gershuni 2021\)](#). However, since at present this crisis is still active in shaping and reshaping socio-medical patterns, it seems as though it is too early to point out the nature and scope of related changes to health and medicine within the Haredi community, and to distinguish between temporary and long-term changes.
2. [In recent years we witness an influx of Haredi male and female nurses throughout Israel, mostly trained in religious nursing programs which comply with religious orientation and restrictions.](#)
3. [According to a 2015 government report on inequality in the health system, only 4% of Haredim feel that they have no one to rely on in times of need \(Averbuch and Avni 2015\).](#)
4. [Inequality Report \(2014\), p. 84.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273205662_y-swyywn bbrywt whhtmwdwt mw 2014](#)
5. [Eleven percent among Haredi men versus 22% among men in the general Jewish Israeli population.](#)
6. [In 2017 49% of Haredi women took a mammography test compared with 73% of secular Jewish women. See: Inequality Report \(2019\), p. 48.
https://www.health.gov.il/PublicationsFiles/inequality-2018.pdf](#)
7. [A total of 3.6 cases per 100,000, compared with 2.5 cases per 100,000 \(Falk and Kalif 2022; Levy et.al. 2012; Nir et.al. 2017\).](#)
8. [Vaccination rates for children aged 2–5 in the general population were 90%, whereas 65% in the Haredi population in Jerusalem and 86% in Bnei Brak.](#)

9. [In 2017, vaccination rates under the age of 17 in Haredi society were 93% versus 89% among the secular Jewish population \(Averbuch and Avni 2019, 48\).](#)
10. [By the end of 2020, over 550,000 youngsters were tested by Dor Yesharim. Out of those, about 3,500 matches were avoided due to genetic mismatch.](#)
11. [Website: https://refuah-vechaim.org.il/](https://refuah-vechaim.org.il/)
12. [Website: http://www.en.laniado.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91&Itemid=88.](http://www.en.laniado.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91&Itemid=88)
13. [Website: https://puah.org.il/](https://puah.org.il/)
14. [Website: https://www.boneiolam.org/](https://www.boneiolam.org/)
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Afterword

Daniel Goldman

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The importance of Haredi society to the future of the State of Israel cannot be overstated. The success or failure of the Zionist enterprise depends, to a large extent, on the mutual relations between wider Israeli society and the Haredim and their possible future integration, socially, politically, and economically. Ironically, this success relies on that segment of the Jewish world which were and often still are ambivalent or even antagonistic to the Zionist movement. Due to the growing centrality of the State of Israel to the future of world Jewry, the outcome of the dynamic processes now underway will influence nothing less than the future of the Jewish people in this century. As such this is an important subject for anyone interested in the future of Israel, whether in Israel or across the Diaspora, in academia and beyond.

At a conference I attended some years ago, *Yaakov* Guterman, the long-serving Mayor of Modi'in Ilit, a large exclusively Haredi city, announced "The Haredim have never changed, they are not changing, and will never change." This has been a core value for the Haredi community ever since its founding. In reality, and despite their ultra-conservative ideology, Haredi society does not stand still. It is in constant flux and tension. Yet many in Israel and beyond have no real idea what happens within the Haredi world. Israelis at large, including policymakers and government officials, often form opinions based on little more than shallow media coverage and common stereotypes. There is little or no distinction between the multiple Haredi communities and their very different characteristics. They are seen through a very narrow lens, mostly around

subjects of great controversy and politics. And that perhaps should come as no surprise. Achieving an understanding of these dynamics is made especially difficult by the opaque nature of Haredi communities, largely separated from the rest of Israeli society. It is in the nature of the Haredi society to build walls. This is to protect its very identity and way of life, keeping the effects of modernity at a minimum, but it also allows a small number within its leadership to officially represent the community to the outside world. Any external attempt to bridge those gaps, even for ostensibly benign reasons, is met with caution and often suspicion. Peeling away the stereotypes and prejudices is the first step to reaching a more nuanced understanding, and this is no easy task.

While numerous books, think-tank research papers and scholarly articles have addressed specific facets of Haredi society, to date, they have been largely focused on two main themes. The first, an attempt to explain to a non-Haredi audience the underlying ideologies prevalent in the Haredi world and the difference between its various streams and sects. The second, addressing the cumulative economic impact of Israel's Haredim on the country's macroeconomic future. But while these are undoubtedly critical issues, they do not do full justice to the Haredi story nor provide a full roadmap for those trying to understand the myriad aspects of this complex, multi-faceted society.

When I began my quest, ten years ago, to understand Haredi society and discover what I might do to effect positive change as an activist and philanthropist, there was no accessible guide to Haredi society, especially in English. Despite the many publications that have been released in the intervening years, such a guide was still lacking. This book is intended to fill that gap even if partially so.

The Haredi communities are the fastest-growing section of Israeli society, now accounting for 12% of the population, but 22% of the class-age children. This is however not the only story. As a result of the core desire to remain separate from mainstream society, protecting their unique lifestyle and education system, the importance is amplified. As the community grows, the economic, political, and cultural impact on society will grow. This in turn raises questions about the future of Israeli society and Israel as a whole and what its collective identity will become. It also raises intriguing questions about the future nature of Haredi society in Israel. The chapters in the book shed some light on different aspects of that question.

From the outside, some see this as a threat while others see it as an opportunity. By way of example and aside from the much-discussed economic

impact of the growth of the community, many secular Israelis are concerned about increasing adoption of Haredi cultural norms with respect to the separation of the sexes in the public space. And on the upside, given the very low comparative rate of matriculation for Haredi boys, any meaningful uptake of high-quality general studies would lead to a great benefit to the Israeli economy.

Of course, of no less importance is how the Haredi community and its leadership sees itself as it becomes an ever-larger part of society. As a small minority, the only thing that mattered with respect to external relations with wider Israel was the protection of the Haredi “reservation” – the independence of the Haredi education system, the freedom from forced military conscription, and the important economic support that the Israeli government provides for those who dedicate themselves to full-time Torah study.

But with increased power, the lines are more blurred, both for the political leadership and for the rank and file. To what degree can or should Haredim be integrated in public life, bringing their unique perspectives to multiple aspects of the public square, at the same time as inevitably lowering the separating walls so fundamental to the Haredi lifestyle; as the community has grown, so have the marginal and peripheral sections of its population, some of whom seek a different balance between Torah study and work, challenging the classic model. Will the sense of civic responsibility of the community or the individuals who make it up change with the change in demographics?

These internal challenges may offer opportunities for partnership and the ability to generate common good, without requiring Haredim to compromise on their identity.

Inside and outside the community, within the field of public leadership, policy-making, philanthropy, and field activists, all these questions are in view, and for many, the starting point ought to be a better understanding of the basic building blocks of Haredi society.

It is worth noting that there remain unanswered questions. By way of example a deeper understanding of the internal economics of the community, squaring the very lowly average incomes and the high percentage of home ownership. We need a much more granular understanding of the political dynamic that drives decision-making across the different parts of this community. Whilst much of this dynamic is purely internally focused, often it has a bearing on the national political map, often in ways opaque to their non-Haredi decision-making counterparts. Even senior and seasoned politicians and government officials have a limited understanding of the dynamics behind the politics of the Haredi

parties at a national and local level.

One final arena worth mentioning is the reality that Haredim will have an increasing influence on Israel-Diaspora relations, as similar demographic changes in Israel are reflected within key Jewish Diaspora communities. As with all other communities, technology has “reduced” distances, so that cooperation across borders has become more intimate and in real-time. Changes in the use of technology within and by the community are significant in this regard. Israel is exporting its politics to the Jewish Diaspora at the same time as the politics and social dynamics of the Diaspora are impacting Israel. And while there are obviously differences in the make-up and lifestyles of the different Haredi populations in Israel and the Diaspora, there are many issues that unite as well as the basic Haredi ideology. A glaring example of this is the entrance for the first of Haredim to the World Zionist Organization. First Shas (the Sefardi Haredim) followed by their Ashkenazi brothers. The American Haredim are now directly lobbying the Israeli government on issues of State and religion bringing their voice to a dialogue that was previously dominated by the Reform and Conservative Movements of North America.

Any student or researcher of Israeli society must take the time to understand this set of phenomena. Equally, anyone engaged in policy or strategic planning within Israel needs to take a more granular and academically grounded approach. This book offers an English-speaking audience a comprehensive guide to the rich diversity of Haredi society across multiple vectors. Written for both an academic and general audience, it is a critical contribution to the growing literature in the field.

This book should be read by every social activist, policymaker, and philanthropist trying to better understand the Haredi world. It will also be of interest for anyone trying to understand the broader societal challenges facing Israel. I only wish it had been available ten years ago. Hopefully, this book will spur further inquiry and research into other areas, such as the mechanics of the domestic Haredi economy and the internal political and power structure of Haredi society, and form the basis for a more informed and nuanced discussion about Israel and its interdependent relations with the burgeoning Haredi communities.

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